



98633

Library of



University of Toronto

College.

Purchased from

Sweet Fund

No


Return on
or before

~~2 MAR 16~~

~~5 MAR 25~~

~~17 MAY 3~~

3 MAY 17



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
Boston Library Consortium Member Libraries



The Founders of the New
Devotion





*The Monument to Thomas à Kempis
in S. Michael's Church, Twolle.
Reproduced by kind permission of Sir F. R. Cruise.*

The Founders of the New Devotion

BEING THE LIVES OF GERARD GROOTE,
FLORENTIUS RADEWIN AND
THEIR FOLLOWERS

BY

THOMAS À KEMPIS



TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY J. P. ARTHUR

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO., LTD.

DRYDEN HOUSE, GERRARD STREET, W.

1905

50
98633

CHISWICK PRESS: CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND CO.
TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON.

BX

890

.75

3

The appearance of à Kempis's "Lives of Gerard Groote and his Followers," in an English garb, should be hailed by Catholics with satisfaction. The translation has been very carefully revised by the Prior of Downside, Fr. Leo Almond, O.S.B., and naught will be found in it but what is edifying. I trust that the book will have a wide circulation, presenting, as it does, one of the brightest pages in the history of an age in which there is much that is sombre.

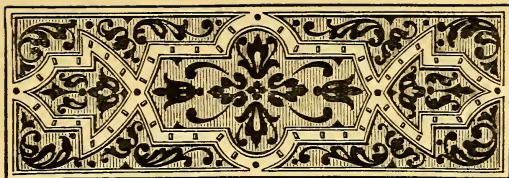
✠ GEORGE AMBROSE BURTON,
Bishop of Clifton.

November 7th, 1904.

ΤΟ

Ε. Η. Ρ.

*Ἔσθ' ὡς ὑπομονὴ τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν·
ὡς οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ Θεοῦ
καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ*



PREFACE



CONSIDERING the wide fame of Thomas à Kempis as the reputed author of "The Imitation of Christ" it is surprising that no English translation of the "Lives of Gerard Groote and his followers" has been published hitherto. The Brotherhood of the Common Life to which à Kempis belonged owed its foundation to Groote and his pupil Florentius, and since that Brotherhood is referred to by the author himself as "The New Devotion," and Groote is called "Nostrae devotionis fundator," I have thought myself justified in giving to this translation the title which it bears, although the *editio princeps* gives no general title to the Lives.

The version here presented does not claim to be savagely literal, but I hope that I have not misrepresented the author in any material point, and that the translation faithfully renders the meaning of the original Latin. In any case I have

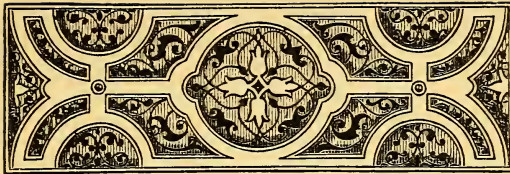
PREFACE

not intentionally distorted or omitted a single phrase.

An introductory chapter has been added, giving a brief and imperfect *résumé* of the conditions under which Groote and his followers lived, together with certain notes dealing with matters to which the text refers.

My cordial thanks are due to several friends who have assisted me, especially to the Rev. S. H. Gem, for many valuable suggestions and references, and to M. P. S. Allen for similar help. I am happy in having this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to the Very Reverend Leo Almond, Prior of Downside Abbey, who has been good enough to read my manuscript and to give me much information on technical points.





CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	ix
INTRODUCTION	xv

THE LIFE OF THE REVEREND MASTER GERARD THE GREAT COMMONLY CALLED GROOTE

CHAP.		PAGE
	Preface: The Preface to the life of the venerable Master Gerard the Great, commonly called "Groote"	3
I.	Of the origin and interpretation of Gerard's name	5
II.	Of his rapid progress at the University of Paris	7
III.	How his conversion was revealed to a hermit in Cologne	8
IV.	How he was drawn to God by the Carthusian	9
V.	Of his change of garb and character	11
VI.	How he separated himself from fellowship with worldlings	13
VII.	Of his abstinence, and the shirt of hair which he wore	15
VIII.	How, by the advice of the Monks, he began to preach the word of God	17
IX.	Of his labours, and his patience toward his enemies	20
X.	Of his journey to the parts about Brabant	23
XI.	Of his austerity in food and clothing	25
XII.	Of his devoutness in prayer and in hearing Holy things	30

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
XIII.	Of his great love of reading the Holy Scriptures	34
XIV.	Of the abundant fruit which he bore in the conversion of men	39
XV.	Of the devout communities and monasteries which arose through him	43
XVI.	Of his happy death and burial	46
XVII.	Of the noble eulogy passed upon Gerard by a Cantor at Paris	51
XVIII.	Of his public profession of faith, and of his delivering the true Gospel in his preaching	52
	Appendix to the Life of Gerard Groote . .	74

THE LIFE OF THE REVERED FLORENTIUS, A DEVOUT PRIEST, AND VICAR OF THE CHURCH OF DEVENTER

CHAP.		PAGE
	Preface	81
I.	Of the humility of Christ which Florentius studied to imitate	85
II.	Of the interpretation of the name Florentius and its three glorious meanings .	86
III.	Of the interpretation of his father's name Radewin	88
IV.	Of his native land, and how he went to study at Prague	90
V.	Of his honourable character in the world	92
VI.	Of his conversion through the preaching of Master Gerard	93
VII.	How he despised the life of the world and joined himself to Master Gerard . . .	95
VIII.	How Florentius himself, now fully converted, did convert many others . . .	96
IX.	Of the burdens that he bore, and the wrongs that he suffered	98
X.	Of his promotion to the priesthood and the abasement of his humility	100
XI.	How seldom he went out, and of his instructive demeanour as he stood in the Choir	102
XII.	Of the simplicity of his garb	105
XIII.	Of his humble service among the Brothers	107

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
XIV.	How he laboured with his hands for the common good	110
XV.	Of his compassion toward the poor, the sick, and the friendless	112
XVI.	Of his feeding the poor, and washing beggars	115
XVII.	Of his abstinence and the infirmities which came upon him by reason of his austerity	118
XVIII.	How he often recovered by the aid of the prayers of the devout	120
XIX.	How upon an Easter Even he was healed by a Vision of Angels	122
XX.	Of one who fell into a well and was drawn out unhurt	124
XXI.	Of the vision of the Rood which appeared over his house	125
XXII.	Of his patience, gentleness, and love toward all men	128
XXIII.	Of his devout exhortation to spiritual prayer	130
XXIV.	Of his effectual preaching and his knowledge of the Scriptures	133
XXV.	How he set a guard upon his tongue and avoided oaths	136
XXVI.	Of three temptations that are full of peril to the devout	138
XXVII.	Of his sending forth the Brothers to gather fruit in divers places	141
XXVIII.	Of his happy passing from this world and his burial in the Church	144
XXIX.	Of a vision which was seen after his death, and of the great glory which he attained	147
	A Letter and certain Notable Sayings of Florentius	150

LIVES OF THE FOLLOWERS OF FATHER FLORENTIUS

Preface	165
-------------------	-----

LIFE OF JOHN GRONDE.

I. Of the first Congregation of Clerks in Deventer	169
II. Concerning John Gronde	172

CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIFE OF JOHN BRINCKERINCK	176
LIFE OF LUBERT BERNER	181
LIFE OF HENRY BRUNE	213
THE LIFE OF GERARD OF ZUTPHEN	220
LIFE OF AMILIUS OF BUREN	226
LIFE OF JAMES OF VIANA	232
LIFE OF JOHN CACABUS	235
LIFE OF ARNOLD OF SCHOONHOVEN	256





INTRODUCTION



THE period covered by the Lives of Gerard Groote and his followers is the hundred years which elapsed between 1340, the date of Groote's birth, and 1439, the year in which Henry Brune died. In order to understand the significance of the movement to which à Kempis has given the name of "The New Devotion," it is necessary briefly to consider the conditions which prevailed at the time when that movement was initiated and the difficulties with which its adherents had to contend.

At the time of Groote's birth the Low Countries were divided into a number of small principalities, each of which was governed by its own Sovereign: of these the most powerful were the Counts of Holland and the Prince Bishops of Utrecht, who as Motley says, "divided between them the Sovereignty of what afterwards became the United States of the Netherlands." By the death of

INTRODUCTION

William IV of Holland in 1355, that country was plunged into a whirlpool of civil discord which did not subside until 1437, when Philip of Burgundy, misnamed "The Good," obtained undisputed possession of the supreme power.

The Bishops of Utrecht, in addition to their spiritual authority, enjoyed a large amount of temporal power, and were for many centuries the most formidable of the opponents to the Counts of Holland. The Bishopric was founded by Charles Martell in the eighth century, that prince having rewarded the Anglo-Saxon monk, Willibrord, with large possessions in the neighbourhood of the town from which the See is named, in recognition of his labours on behalf of the Faith. Winfred or Bonifacius who succeeded, received further accessions of territory, and by his efforts and his martyr's death at Dokkum, Christianity was established yet more firmly in the Netherlands. The power of his successors, the later Bishops, gradually but continually increased, and since in earlier years the authority of these prelates was frequently exercised in the defence of the people against oppression, it rested upon a foundation surer than any which could be laid by Royal Grant or Charter.

The district of Overijssel with which we are more immediately concerned, though it formed a portion of the dominions of the prince Bishops, enjoyed at this time a certain measure of independence, being administered by a council com-

INTRODUCTION

posed of representatives of the nobility and of the three cities, Deventer, Kempen and Zwolle. The Bishop, indeed, presided over this council, but he seems to have allowed to its members complete freedom of decision upon any points which arose, and to have waived his rights of interference even in cases concerning clerks who dwelt in the three towns above named ("Belgii Confœderati Respub.," p. 254, Elzevir, 1630). But though the power of the Bishops had in earlier days afforded protection to the people, their government became more and more arbitrary and despotic, a result which was due to a variety of causes too complex to enumerate; certain points, however, must be borne in mind, of which perhaps the most important is the slight deference shown by these Bishops to their Spiritual Head. Some thirty-five years before our period begins, Clement V had removed the Papal Chair to Avignon, and thus he and his successors became unduly dependent upon the favour of the French Kings, and as a natural consequence the Papal authority was for the time greatly weakened. Of the Popes who reigned during the period under consideration the first five, namely, Benedict XII, Clement VI, Innocent VI, Urban V and Gregory XI, resided in France, but after the death of Gregory, the "Great Schism" broke out to still further relax the authority of the Holy See. It is impossible here to describe in detail the course of this unhappy feud, but since Groote is praised for his loyalty to

INTRODUCTION

Urban VI it is desirable to note the fact that the best authorities agree that the election of that Pontiff was regular, and that the action of the Cardinals who declared the election void was illegal. It should be remembered also that whereas the Popes named above were all of French nationality, Urban VI was an Italian, and that the Schism was due to political rather than to Religious considerations.

The election of Urban took place in 1378, and in the same year certain of the Cardinals, claiming that the menaces of the Roman populace had hindered their freedom of choice, elected Robert of Geneva, who took the title of Clement VII. Urban refused to recognize his deposition and took up his residence at Rome, while Clement went to Avignon. Thus there were two claimants to the Papacy, a condition of things which not only weakened the Church by dividing Catholic Christendom into two parties, but also embittered the already existing civil and political strife. On the death of Urban VI the Italian party elected Boniface IX as his successor, and five years later Benedict XIII was chosen to succeed Clement at Avignon. Boniface was followed by Innocent VII, who, however, survived his election by two years only, and on his death the Italian Cardinals chose Angelo Corrarío, who is known to History as Gregory XII. This pontiff and Benedict undertook to resign their claims if such resignation should seem likely to promote the peace of the church,

INTRODUCTION

but as events proved neither was willing to carry out his promise, and in 1409 nine of the Cardinals who had supported Benedict made common cause with the Italian party, and the latter being thus strengthened, convoked the Council of Pisa which condemned and deposed both Popes, and chose John of Candia, who took the name of Alexander V.

The deposed Pontiffs, however, refused to recognize the validity of this sentence, so that there were now three claimants to St. Peter's Throne, and although Alexander died in 1410, the strife of parties was not thereby lessened, since the sixteen Cardinals who had elected him now chose in his place another Italian who is known as John XXIII. He it was who in 1414 convoked the council of Constance, perhaps expecting that Council to support his pretensions and depose his rivals, but if this was his expectation it was disappointed, for by the unanimous vote of the Council John was himself deposed, and shortly afterwards Gregory expressed his willingness to resign. Sentence of deposition was subsequently passed upon Benedict, who, however, continued to claim, and so far as he could to exercise, the Papal authority until his death in 1423, when the two Cardinals who had continued to support him chose Clement VIII in his place. Meanwhile the Council of Constance had chosen Otto de Colonna, who as Martin V succeeded in healing the Schism, for in 1429 Clement, the last of the Anti-Popes, was persuaded to resign.

INTRODUCTION

In view of the complexity of these proceedings it may be convenient to append a table of the Popes who reigned during the period under discussion, the names of Anti-Popes being in italics:

Benedict XII	Innocent VII	}
Clement VI	<i>Benedict XIII</i>	}
Innocent VI	Gregory XII	}
Urban V	<i>Benedict XIII</i>	}
Gregory XI		
Urban VI	Alexander V	}
<i>Clement VII</i>	<i>Gregory XII</i>	}
	<i>Benedict XIII</i>	}
Boniface IX	John XXIII	}
<i>Clement VII</i>	<i>Gregory XII</i>	}
<i>Benedict XIII</i>	<i>Benedict XIII</i>	}
	Martin V	

Besides the Schism other causes tended to weaken the Papal authority in the country with which we have to deal. The Bishops of Utrecht were dependent rather upon the favour of the Emperor than upon that of the Pope, and even during the years which marked the increase of the Papal authority throughout Europe, there are many instances of strong resistance being offered to it both in the Low Countries and elsewhere in Northern Europe. Heresy, as Motley has pointed out, was a plant of early growth in the Netherlands, and "from the earliest times neither Prince

INTRODUCTION

People nor even Prelates had been very dutiful to the Pope." Students of history will remember many instances of resistance to the Papal claims in England, especially during the reigns of Edward III. and his immediate successors, and as early as 1413 the feeling of the people against the clergy led the commons to petition Henry V. to seize certain revenues of the Church, and apply them to the service of the State.

It is necessary, however, to go back to an earlier period than this in order to trace the development of the feeling of which such acts were the outcome, and it is impossible to deny that ecclesiastical dignitaries and the subordinate clergy gave many provocations to the civil power and to the people at large in the years which preceded the time of which we speak.

As early as the beginning of the twelfth century the notorious Tanchelyn, an illiterate impostor, caused great commotion in Brabant by his denunciations of the clergy, and although his utterances were blasphemous and his conduct was grotesquely indecent, he gained for a time a considerable following, a result which could hardly have occurred had there been no substratum of truth in the protest which he made against clerical domination. During the progress of the same century other teachers arose to cause divisions and strife in the Church to which they professed allegiance, and, naturally enough, persecution followed, to be attended as usual by a yet more

INTRODUCTION

luxuriant growth in that which it strove to eradicate. By the end of the thirteenth century the clerical power had begun to decline. The enormous wealth of the Church aroused the cupidity of the civil power, and the depravity of many clerks excited the indignation of thoughtful men. Even those who would not consent to rob the Church of her possessions, were forced to admit that the influence of great wealth was not wholly for good: that luxurious indolence was too often the effect of it: and that the austerity of life and sobriety of conduct which marked certain sects which were regarded as heretical, could not but give those sects a firm hold upon the minds of the people. It was perhaps to this feeling that the great popularity of the mendicant orders was due, but in any case that popularity grew continuously throughout the thirteenth century, and the orders themselves multiplied to an extent so inconvenient that the council of Lyons in 1274 had decreed the suppression of all such orders as had sprung up since the Pontificate of Innocent III. Thus four mendicant orders only were left, namely, the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Carmelites and the Hermits of St. Augustine, and the reputation for sanctity enjoyed by these orders was such that it became a common practice for testators to provide in their wills that their bodies should be wrapped in a Dominican or Franciscan habit, in the hope of thereby obtaining mercy in the Day of Judgement. This popularity, however, was followed by a re-

INTRODUCTION

action; thus in our own country Richard of Armagh and others attacked the authority of the mendicants, and it was to his opposition to them that Wyclif owed the sentence of deprivation that was passed on him. In addition to the effect of such attacks from without, the societies were also weakened by internal dissensions, many of which appear to the modern reader as frivolous and puerile, being based upon philosophical rather than upon religious differences, though others had their origin in more serious matters. It is, however, only necessary for our purpose to remind the reader of the bitter quarrels between the different sections of Franciscans and of the long feud between the latter and the Dominicans.

Amongst other religious bodies which flourished during this period are the Lollards and Béguines, of whom it is necessary to make special mention, as they are referred to in the Lives. The former name is constantly used by English writers as if it were descriptive of the followers of Wyclif only, whereas the term is applied by other authors to the Franciscan Tertiaries, the Cellites, the Brothers of the Common Life, and many others. The term Lollard with its variants, Lollhard, Lullhard, Lollert and Lullert means primarily "a singer," and denotes one who is constantly singing hymns to God. Thus it is applied to various bodies, without reference to the orthodoxy of their opinions. This explains the use of the word in the text where it is used in its literal signification, although

INTRODUCTION

the name had already become a term of reproach in consequence of their hypocrisy and pernicious sentiments that were attributed to many persons who professed extraordinary piety. Thus Hocsemius, a Canon of Liége, writing of the year 1309, says, "certain strolling hypocrites who were called Lollards or 'praisers of God,' deceived persons of quality" ("Gesta Pontif. Leod.," ii, 350).

The name "Béguine" is also of somewhat uncertain signification, being applied both to that body which owed its origin to an austere branch of the Franciscan order, and also to certain German and Belgic societies which flourished during the thirteenth and following centuries. It is with the latter only that we have to do, and it is sufficient for our purpose to say that though it has been shown that certain societies called by this name were established in Holland and Flanders as early as the eleventh century, it was not until the thirteenth that they gained any great celebrity. It appears that a number of pious women associated themselves together and lived under the rule of a superior of their own sex, dividing their time between devotional exercises and honest labour. They did not, however, bind themselves by vows, but were at liberty to quit the society or to marry if so disposed. The name Béguine means—like Beghard—"one who is assiduous in prayer," and having been used at first of pious persons generally, became afterwards applied to the so-

INTRODUCTION

cieties above mentioned. After a period of prosperity which lasted until the early part of the fourteenth century the Béguines fell into disrepute, and although John XXII and his successors afforded them some protection they continued to fall both in wealth and prosperity, because as it would seem they were supposed to have been corrupted by the infamous opinions of the Brethren of the Free Spirit. Hence it is that we find the name used in the Life of Florentius as a term of reproach. This period, marked as it was by civil and religious discord, was of course favourable to the production of fanatic enthusiasts and visionaries, such as the Flagellants who caused some commotion in 1340, and the Dancers who disturbed the Netherlands in 1373. Somewhat later, but still during our period, arose the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit, the Men of Understanding, and other sects, all of which added to the disorder of this unhappy time, and disturbed in a special degree the country in which Groot and his followers lived.

Although the explosion caused by the condemnation of Huss took place in another land, its echoes were heard and some of its effects felt in Holland and the surrounding districts. Huss was condemned and suffered in 1415, and his friend Jerome of Prague in the following year; but the religious dissensions and the barbarous war which they caused continued to disturb further an already distracted world, until Æneas Sylvius, the emis-

INTRODUCTION

sary of the Council of Basel, succeeded in reconciling the more reasonable section of the Hussites to the Church, in 1433. Whatever view may be taken as to the justice or otherwise of the condemnation of the views of Huss, there can be no doubt that the demands of those of his followers who are known as Taborites were grossly extravagant, that their doctrines were grotesque and heretical, and that their conduct was at least as barbarous and cruel as that of their most fanatical opponents.

It was not by actual heretics only that the peace of the Church was disturbed; various abuses had slowly developed, and were tolerated by many persons whose orthodoxy was never questioned. We need, however, deal only with those to which reference is made in the text.

It will be observed that Groote lays great stress upon the evils of pluralism, and indeed the disastrous consequences of the non-enforcement of the Canons against this abuse must have been evident to all. According to Hallam ("Mid. Ages," c. 7, p. 2) there were cases of fifty, or even sixty benefices being held by a single incumbent, and in our own country it was found that in 1367 some clerks enjoyed more than twenty benefices. An abuse of a like nature was the holding by persons other than priests of ecclesiastical preferments. Thus Petrarch was enabled to enjoy the revenues of two benefices although he never took full orders. Closely connected with these abuses we find the crime of Simony, a term that, in the wider sense

INTRODUCTION

in which Groote uses it, must be taken to include many things besides the actual sale and purchase of benefices, such as the traffic in Indulgences which, as all who are conversant with the history of this period are aware, was lamentably common. Odious as is any traffic in the temporalities attached to spiritual cures, the Church has found great difficulty in suppressing it: as early as the eleventh century such simony was a reproach to the clergy in Holland and to the patrons "who made their powers of nomination and investiture subservient to their rapacity." By the ancient canons, indeed, a benefice was avoided by any simoniacal payment or stipulation, but for obvious reasons this law was seldom enforced; as time went on the practice became more and more common in spite of the protests of upright churchmen. In 1377 the English Parliament presented a petition to Edward III complaining of the greed of patrons, and in Germany, according to Sismondi, things were even worse than in England. Pope Urban VI owed no small part of his unpopularity with a section of churchmen to their fear that he would interfere with their illegitimate profits, and the council of Constance proposed to deal with this growing evil.

A modern reader might perhaps feel some surprise at the severity with which Groote speaks of usurers, but it is well known that from very early times the practice of usury was regarded as criminal. In the year 1179 Alexander III decreed that usurers "*nec ad communionem recipiantur*

INTRODUCTION

altaris, nec Christianam si in hoc peccato decesserint, accipiant sepulturam, sed nec oblationem eorum quisquam accipiat." So, too, in Spain the Inquisition took cognisance of usury, and long after the Reformation Anglican Divines continued to speak with horror of the practice—indeed, it may be doubted whether the prejudice against what is essentially a legitimate commercial transaction is even now dead, although the unanimous verdict of economists ought to have settled the question.

It is unnecessary to comment upon the protest made by Groote against the grosser sins of his contemporaries, but no one who takes the trouble to examine the evidence can doubt that his protests were fully justified.

Since many references are made in the *Lives to Schools and Universities*, it may be well to review briefly the state of learning during this period. The interest in classical studies, which had declined during the latter half of the thirteenth century, was revived to a great extent in the fourteenth, and during the lifetime of Groote and his followers many schools and universities were founded and became flourishing institutions, as, for example, at Cologne, Florence, Pisa, and Prague. The study of Greek, which had been neglected, was revived, owing to the influence of such scholars as Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Manuel Chrysolaras, and although the enthusiasm for classical learning was

INTRODUCTION

more marked in Italy than elsewhere, these great scholars had followers in Northern Europe as well as in their own land.

Somewhat earlier than the period with which we deal, Clement V had given encouragement to the study of Hebrew and other Oriental languages, which he directed "should be taught in public schools that the Church might never lack a sufficient number of missionaries properly qualified to dispute with Jews and Mohammedans, and to diffuse the light of the gospel throughout the East." Mathematical study, which was regarded with some suspicion, owing to its supposed connection with astrology and magic, had been pursued with success by Thomas Bradwardine, Archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1349), although the history of such enquirers as Cecco d'Ascoli hardly encouraged others to pursue that branch of knowledge. The University of Paris at which Groote studied was specially famous for Scholastic Theology, and it is interesting to note that Groote is said to have acquired great learning in Civil as well as Common law, although the study of the former was prohibited in that university: we know, however, from other sources that the prohibition was disregarded. The University of Prague, of which Florentius was a member, was not founded until 1350, but its repute grew rapidly and attracted many students, until, as Badius says ("Vita Thomae à Kempis," viii, § 7), "it became infected by heresy," when it fell into disrepute with

INTRODUCTION

orthodox Catholics. The reference is, of course, to the Hussite troubles which had their origin here, Huss having persuaded the authorities to take away three votes from the German party in University elections. This produced a secession, to which the University of Leipsic owes its origin, and the ill feeling which the action of Huss aroused was no doubt one of the causes which led to his condemnation.

Another great centre of learning was the school of Cologne, which is called by Angelius "the child of the University of Paris and the mother of that at Louvain." This institution was founded by Urban VI in 1388, while the academy at Louvain was raised to the dignity of an university by John IV of Brabant in 1423.

Though we have some considerable knowledge as to the subjects taught and the methods pursued in the Universities during this period, very few records remain of school life. A Kempis himself, as he tells us in "The Life of Florentius," was a pupil in the school of Deventer, of which institution John Boheme was master; a notice of this school may be found in "De Laet. Belg. Descript.," ed. 1630, p. 239, where we learn that the subjects taught were Philosophy, Theology, Hebrew, and Civil law. As to the methods adopted we may gather some information from the chronicles of Windesheim by Buschius, a contemporary of à Kempis. In this work there is an account of John Cele, who is mentioned in the life of Grootte,

INTRODUCTION

and his biographer gives some account of the school of Zwolle of which Cele was master from 1376 to 1417. In all probability the schools at Zwolle and Deventer were managed on similar lines, so that Buschius' account of the former has some interest for us. Strict discipline seems to have been maintained among the eight hundred scholars, details of which may be found in the chronicle above-named, and in Kettlewell's work, entitled, "Thomas à Kempis and the Brothers of the Common Life." Further information about Cele himself may be derived from the chronicle of Mt. St. Agnes.

The principle of Association which led to the formation of Trade Guilds in this part of the world was extended so as to include other interests, and to this principle was due the formation of the Guilds of Rhetoric which flourished in most of the principal towns. The importance for our purpose of such association is the influence they exercised over the people, for it is a remarkable fact that the cultivation of the arts and the pursuit of knowledge were during the fourteenth century by no means confined to the upper classes. During the time of which we speak the influence of these Guilds in the Low Countries was not so great as it afterwards became, but in France and Germany such associations had already considerable importance. Amongst other things the guilds encouraged theatrical performances, some of which were conducted in the churches, as, for instance, "King

INTRODUCTION

Herod and his Deeds," which was enacted in Utrecht Cathedral in 1418 (Motley, *loc. cit.*). Their efforts, however, were not confined to the exhibition of religious dramas, and it is not unlikely that the "idle amusements and spectacles" mentioned in the text were entertainments organized by these societies.

Some reference must be made to the social condition of the people in the days of Groote and his followers. In spite of the disturbances which perpetually recurred, this was a period during which wealth accumulated with astonishing rapidity. The flourishing condition of the wool trade in Flanders, Brabant and Hainault was the chief cause of this prosperity, but the fisheries of Zeland and Holland also contributed to it. Cologne had long been a great trading centre, and as early as 1220 the merchants of that city set up a factory in London. The opening of trade in the Baltic through the enterprise of the Hanseatic confederacy and the development of commercial intercourse with southern Europe during the fourteenth century also contributed to make this accumulation of wealth possible, and there can be no doubt that the Trade Guilds, to which reference has been made, assisted the merchants to resist the arbitrary measures of their nominal rulers and to amass riches which rivalled or surpassed those of the ancient nobility. Agriculture, too, had made considerable progress, largely owing to the efforts of the Religious Houses to which grants of

INTRODUCTION

waste land were made, and these being cleared and put under cultivation added largely to the wealth of the countries in which they were situated.

The continuance of this prosperity appears the more remarkable when we consider the fact that throughout this period the countries of which we speak were devastated from time to time by visitations of the Plague and the Black Death; no less than six of the Brothers whose lives are here written died of these diseases, and à Kempis notes that many others of the community met with a like fate. The horrible pestilence called the Plague seems to have reached Europe from the Levant in 1346. A year or two later it ravaged France and England, and in 1350 appeared in an aggravated form in Germany and the Low Countries. Other severe visitations occurred in 1361, 1366, 1398, 1404 and 1439, and although we must receive with reserve the statements of contemporary chronicles as to the mortality caused by these pestilences, there can be no doubt that a considerable proportion of the population was swept off by them. According to Sismondi between four and five millions died in France alone during the first plague, and although some of the later epidemics appear to have been less deadly, the devastation caused by them cannot but have affected detrimentally the material progress of the country, and great misery must have resulted, especially amongst the poor, to whose service the Brothers of the Common Life specially devoted themselves.

INTRODUCTION

Another disease which scourged the country was leprosy, and this complaint is mentioned several times in the text. According to the greatest living authority leprosy is caused by a diet of more or less putrid fish. If this theory is correct, a country like that of which we speak would be likely to suffer, since in it fish formed the staple diet of many of the people, and in the inland parts especially salted fish was largely eaten, even on occasions when abstinence from flesh was not ordained.

The existence in France of two thousand leper houses, and in Europe as a whole of nineteen thousand such establishments, shows how severe a scourge this complaint must have been (Sprengel, "Hist. de la Médecine," ii. 374, quoted by Buckle). The treatment to which the unfortunate victims of the disease were subjected added to the horror of their lot, and the action of the Brothers in ministering to them is the more laudable inasmuch as by so doing they ran counter to the prevailing prejudices and superstitions; for at this time—and indeed long afterwards—diseases in general and leprosy in particular were looked upon as indications of Divine wrath rather than as being due to natural causes. It appears that some of the Brothers had a knowledge of medicine, and though Groote deprecates the practice of this art it is probable that he was not altogether unacquainted with it; in any case he must have had the famous saying of Hippocrates in his mind when he laid

INTRODUCTION

down the rule “not to give remedies of doubtful virtue.”

It seems that the first suggestion for the formation of a Brotherhood came from Florentius (see Buschius Chr. of Windesheim), who with the assent of Groote gathered together a number of young clerks and copyists who were willing to live a Common Life. These persons took no formal vows, but undertook to obey such rules as might be drawn up from time to time for the government of the Community, and from this small beginning grew the Brotherhood of the Common Life. Although the credit for this suggestion is due in part to Florentius, yet Groote himself had formerly desired to found a religious community. Lack of means, however, and the opposition of the existing Orders, which he foresaw, had hindered the execution of this design: the former difficulty was overcome by the generosity of one Lambert Stuerman, who by his will left a large sum of money at Groote's disposal; but Groote himself did not live long enough to carry out his desires. On his death-bed, however, he gave instructions to his followers to build and establish a House, and transfer to it such members of the original society as might desire to join. He particularly directed that this House should adopt the Rule of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine, assigning the following reasons for his decision. He did not desire, he said, that the members of

INTRODUCTION

the Order should be wholly separated from the world like the Carthusians, nor that the Rule under which they lived should be as severe as that of the Cistercians. On the other hand, he was aware of the advantage to be derived by adhering to the rule of an established order, for by this means he hoped to overcome or avoid the opposition of the Mendicants, who would certainly do their utmost to crush an entirely new society.

Obedient to the directions given by their leader, Florentius, whom Groote had named as his successor, proceeded at once to build the House at Windesheim, a desolate place between Zwolle and Deventer. Afterwards, as the movement gained fresh adherents other houses were built, such as that near Arnheim, called "The Fount of the Blessed Mary," that near Hoern, named "The House of the New Light," and a third, called "The House of Mount St. Agnes," at Nemel.

The Rule which was thus adopted had been summarized by Kettlewell (p. 173), and contains the following headings:

- I. To observe the fundamental law of Love, and to imitate the example of the Mother Church of Jerusalem in union of heart and in having all things in common.
- II. To learn the lesson of Humility, according to the pattern of the Life of Christ and that of His nearest and most faithful followers.

INTRODUCTION

- III. To observe the Canonical Hours and times of prayer.
- IV. To take charge of the sick and infirm wherever they be found, and to minister to their bodily and spiritual needs.
- V. To avoid all affectation and singularity in dress.
- VI. To give and receive fraternal correction and admonition from one another, to confess our faults and to submit ourselves wholly to our Superior.
- VII. To promote in all things the interest of the Community; to be diligent in all duties and never to be idle.
- VIII. To observe outward cleanliness and decency, and to take proper care of the body for the sake of the soul, both in health and sickness.

In connection with this last provision it is interesting to find that in consequence of the austerities practised by certain of the Brothers in the earlier days of the Community at Deventer their health failed, and therefore the custom was established at Windesheim of exacting from every member a promise "to endeavour to eat well, and sleep well."

The habit adopted by the Brothers was of dark grey cloth, and when they became Canons Regular they wore a white rochet with a black hood.

It will be noticed that the only title given to the head of the community in the following lives is

INTRODUCTION

that of Rector. The first "Prior" of the Order appears to have been John à Kempis (elected in 1398), the elder brother of Thomas, to whom reference is made in the life of Gronde.

The members of the Brotherhood were divided into two classes, the Clerks and the Unlettered Brethren; and of these the former devoted themselves to the cause of education, and to copying books in addition to the duties above indicated, while the latter occupied themselves in manual labour.

It is beside our purpose to trace in detail the growth and decline of this society, but it may not be out of place to indicate some of the causes of that decline.

Some writers of repute have referred to à Kempis, Gerard Groote and others who belonged to this society as forerunners of the Reformation, and it is true enough to say that their teaching and that of certain leaders of the Protestant movement had points of contact. To say this, however, is to say very little, for the same statement might be made equally truly of the teaching of Luther and that of Bellarmine, whilst a very moderate degree of ingenuity would suffice to show that on many points Calvin was at one with St. Francis Xavier. Groote indeed protests against various abuses, but so also does Urban VI; and if Gerard of Zutphen advocates the dissemination of portions of the Scripture in the vulgar tongue, it was

INTRODUCTION

a Pope who praised the Archbishop of Florence for publishing the sacred writings in the language of his own country. It is hardly possible to read the lives which follow without admitting that both their subjects and their author were loyal to their Church and to its head: on this point the appendix to the life of Lubert Berner would appear to be conclusive, for the temptations there described would probably be regarded in a very different light by one whose leanings were toward Protestantism.

It is perhaps more true to say that the movement called the New Devotion is one manifestation of a tendency which, according to the direction given to it, may become either a source of additional power, or a cause of disruption. This is not in any sense a controversial work, for which, indeed, the writer has no qualifications, and these lives, with the other writings of à Kempis, may be left to tell their own story; but since a late writer seems to represent the Reformation as the "fruit" of the labour of the Brothers of the Common Life (Kettlewell, p. 379), it is necessary to remark that the Founder of the Brotherhood uses the words, "Salvo Semper judicio Sacrosanctae Romanae ecclesiae cui humillime undique et ubique me submitto," and his followers never departed from the principle here laid down. Had that principle been adopted universally, the Reformation could never have taken the course it did take. There is a wide difference between protests that are directed

INTRODUCTION

against breaches of recognized law, and deliberate revolt against the fundamental principles upon which those laws are based. The former course was adopted by Grootte and his followers, whilst Luther and his adherents chose the latter. Moreover, neither Gerard Grootte nor any of his followers whose lives are written here, attacked any doctrine of the Catholic creed, nor did they claim that liberty of interpretation which many Reformers allowed. The decline of the Community coincided with the rise of Protestantism, but the causes of that decline are not far to seek. In the first place the Brothers had supported themselves to a great extent by copying books, a source of revenue which came to an end with the introduction of the printing press. Secondly, their schools had to face the competition of similar institutions which sprang up during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In some cases their own pupils successfully competed with them, in others the Institutions founded by the Society of Jesus became popular at the expense of the schools maintained by the Brothers of the Common Life. Thirdly, "when the struggle about the Reformation became acute, the Pápal Party insisted that those who clave to the Church as a divine institution, must either withdraw from their monasteries or give in their adherence to them," and "This led to a great disbandonment of the Brotherhood" (Kettlewell, p. 379). From this it appears that even in the later days to which the passage quoted refers, the Brotherhood as a whole

INTRODUCTION

had not adopted the tenets of the reforming party, while in earlier times, as we have already seen, the members were thoroughly loyal to Rome; indeed, the association received the approbation of the Council of Constance, which would not have been given had their fidelity been suspected.

The text which had been adopted for this translation is that of Somalius, which was published in 1600. The Editor tells us in his preface that he collated all the known manuscripts, and paid special attention to those which he found written in à Kempis's own hand, in the monastery of St. Martin at Louvain; he, however, omits, as he says, certain lives, because the manuscripts were in so bad a condition that he could make nothing of them. It appears uncertain whether these omitted lives were really by Thomas à Kempis. The earliest printed edition is that published at Nuremberg in 1492-1494, of which copies are to be found in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and in the British Museum, and this edition contains no lives other than those given by Somalius. The book begins with the "Imitation," which occupies twenty-six leaves, and goes on with "Tractatus de meditatione Cordis Johannis Gerson," the inclusion of which work in a volume devoted to Thomas à Kempis, is remarkable in view of the controversy which has arisen with regard to the authorship of the "Imitation." It is beside our purpose to discuss this vexed question, as

INTRODUCTION

there is no doubt as to the authenticity of the "Lives" or of the propriety of their attribution to à Kempis, but it may be worth while to mention the fact that the present writer has seen a MS. of the first book of the "Imitatio," whose date would seem to be about 1423, in which that work is assigned to a Carthusian Monk.

Besides the Nuremberg Folio there are other printed editions earlier than that of Somalius, which the latter seems to have consulted, namely, the works of à Kempis published in Paris by Jodocus Badius Ascensius in 1500, and re-issued in 1549. For purposes of correction this edition is of little value, since the same blunders and misprints occur frequently both in this and in Somalius' edition; but it is interesting as containing a Life of à Kempis in twelve chapters written by the Editor, of which the eighth gives some further particulars as to Gerard Groote, while the eleventh contains a long exhortation addressed to à Kempis by Florentius Radewin.

"The Lives" are written in the form of a dialogue between an elder Brother of the house and a Novice, and were no doubt intended for the instruction of those who should join the Brotherhood. In the Nuremberg Folio the whole of Book II (the Life of Florentius) is entitled "de humilitate Christi," a title which is confined in Somalius's edition to the first chapter of this biography; this heading gives the key-note to the whole composition, for throughout the Lives the

INTRODUCTION

virtues upon which the author insists most strongly are those of humility and obedience. There are several points to be noted with reference to the matter contained in these biographies. (1) The use of quotations from the Bible is somewhat peculiar, or at least may strike the modern reader as being so; *e.g.*, passages are taken away from their context and made to bear a meaning other than that which they were intended primarily to convey. This "mystical interpretation" was then regarded as legitimate, and, indeed, is still so regarded by many persons. The quotations are of course from the Vulgate, and the translations are taken usually from the Douay version.

(2) With regard to the last chapter of Groote's Life, it is obvious from a perusal of the original that the whole is taken from notes made by Gerard himself, which notes were left in a fragmentary condition, and were not thrown into regular literary form, probably because they were intended for the writer's own guidance and not for publication. Thus we find constant changes from the first to the second person, and it is often doubtful where the consideration of one subject ends and that of another begins; this is particularly noticeable in § 16.

(3) Hirsche has remarked that "the details given in these eleven biographies are either derived from the personal experiences of à Kempis himself or are drawn from the testimony of reliable witnesses," and the manner in which some

INTRODUCTION

of the incidents are related suggests that even when the author does not expressly mention his own name he was personally concerned in the events which he describes. Thus we gather a certain amount of information as to à Kempis himself, which is the more interesting in view of the scanty knowledge which has come down to us directly of the life of one whose name has become a household word.

(4) Appended to these biographies is a life of the Virgin Lydewig, to whom reference is made in the notice of Arnold of Schoonhoven. This life is not included in the present translation, which is devoted to the Lives of Groote and his followers only. There is little doubt, however, that it is an authentic work of à Kempis, as a copy of it exists in his own handwriting, though the original MSS., containing the Lives of the eleven Brethren and the chronicles of Mount St. Agnes have disappeared. On the other hand, the life is prefaced by a dedication ascribing it to "Frater N pauper peregrinus," but this may easily refer to Thomas himself.

I have already disclaimed any intention of entering into the controversy regarding the authorship of the "Imitatio," but as several passages in the latter work are closely parallel to sentences in the Lives it seems advisable to call attention to the fact. The reader will find particulars in "Hirsche," v. 2. p. 523.

(6) The date of the composition of these lives

INTRODUCTION

cannot be determined with certainty. Hirsche states that 1430 is the last date that occurs, being the year of Arnold's death, but as I have already pointed out, the text which has been adopted gives 1439 as the last year of Henry Brune, and there is reason to think that this date is correct since Brune is said to have lived "long after those who had known their first fervour in the Devout Life with him." All we can say on the question of the date is that the Lives were written later than 1440 and that the author was upwards of sixty years of age when he wrote them.

Hitherto no complete translation of the Lives into English has been published, although several writers have made extracts from them. The Rev. S. Kettlewell in his "Thomas a Kempis and the Brothers of the Common Life" has given us versions of selected passages, and as the present translation differs widely in many places from the versions given in the work named it may be desirable in the interests of accuracy to refer to some of the more prominent of those differences. In Groote, chap. viii, § 2, we have a passage which runs thus: "*Cum tuba salutari intonaret . . . comota sunt corda plurimorum a facie formidinis Domini, et a ventura ira iudicii extremi, et ignis extremi*": according to Kettlewell this means that Groote "entirely abandoned the vulgar arguments drawn from the fears of Hell," an interpretation which is both impossible in view of the original

INTRODUCTION

text, and is a complete misrepresentation of Groote's teaching (Kettlewell, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed., p. 70). Again in chap. ix, § 2, we have "Tanto libentius doctrinam audiebant quanto majora pietatis beneficia in eo redundare videbant." Kettlewell takes this to mean that the more the scribes listened to Gerard's teaching "the more did they seem to abound in beneficent acts of piety," (Kettlewell, p. 72.) So, too, in Florentius, chap. xiv, § 3, "Incontinenti expedit" is rendered by "he extricated the incontinent man" (Kettlewell, p. 106), whereas the passage means, as I think, "he settled the matter out of hand": and in chap. xix, § 3, "quod cuidam revelatum esset quod adhuc supervicturus esset" is translated "it was revealed respecting him to some one who is still living," a rendering which is grammatically impossible.

Such slips as "a quarter of an hour" for "quartâ horâ," "liquor" for "cibus," "soul" for "mensa," and the like, are of small moment, but they show at least that to differ from a translator who committed such blunders does not argue a great amount of audacity. More serious, however, are such mistakes as that made in the "Life of John Ketel," when Kettlewell makes à Kempis say that John was "*so lately* well known to me" instead of "in old days well known," etc. In regard to this it is only necessary to observe that Ketel had been dead for more than forty years when à Kempis wrote these words, and to use the phrase "*so lately*" is to confuse dates. It is not necessary to

INTRODUCTION

multiply instances of the mistakes, more or less important, made by this translator, but the reliability of his work may be judged by “quid praetendit ille bonus homo”—what a good man he has shown himself to be; “integros panes”—“the whole of the bread” though the context requires “whole loaves:” “ferens patienter verba increpantis”—“hearing the words with incredible patience.” All these blunders occur in the translation of a single page of the Latin.

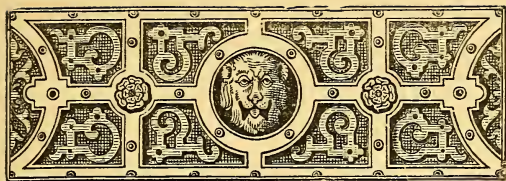
Kettlewell's work, however, is not without its value, as apart from his extracts from the Lives, it contains much information that is of interest to students of à Kempis, and the present writer would not have singled out the above passages for adverse comment but for his desire to justify himself in differing from one who is regarded as a leading authority.





THE LIFE OF THE REVEREND MASTER
GERARD THE GREAT COMMONLY
CALLED GROOTE





THE
LIFE OF GERARD THE GREAT
PREFACE

The Preface to the life of the venerable Master Gerard the Great, commonly called "Groote"

(1)

WITH the help of God, and daring much for the sake of Charity, I will try, my most beloved brother, to set forth the acts of the Fathers, though I recount but few out of many: and this I do by reason of thy frequent importunities, and for the common good.

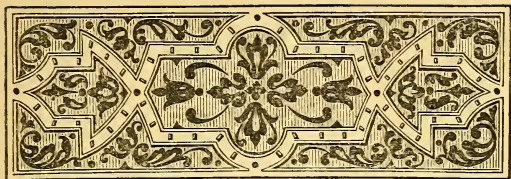
Now since many Fathers and devout brethren, who were of old well known to me, are fallen asleep, I fear not to speak of their virtues, that by so doing I may leave a good memorial of them to those that come after, when I speak of the excellent example which they set, to enhance yet more the honour of the name of God. I will begin therefore from that notable and devout preacher the venerable Master Gerard who is surnamed "Groote."

THE LIFE OF GERARD THE GREAT

(2) After this, if the Lord will, I will add further certain examples of holy conversation, drawn from the lives of those devout brethren who were his disciples, hoping thereby to stir up thy devotion, and that of other single-minded brethren.

Though I did not see Gerard in the flesh, yet have I known in the body divers men who owned discipleship to him, and from these I have often heard of his good deeds; so that thou must not think that I have devised these things of mine own imagination, but rather that I have received a faithful relation thereof from trusty persons, both men and women.





CHAPTER I

Of the origin and interpretation of Gerard's name

(1)



HE venerable Master Gerard, called the "Great," was a citizen of the city of Deventer, born of honourable parents of that same place, and tenderly nurtured by the loving care of his family; the name which he inherited from his earthly parents was apt enough, but by Divine providence it was afterwards changed for a better; for he who had exchanged his former manner of life for a new mode of living, justly deserved that his name too should have a godly signification by reason of his signal virtues, as the following narrative will show.

(2) His name Gerard may be interpreted as meaning one "gerens artes," that is, "cultivating the arts," because being given up to literary studies he was deeply learned in the liberal arts and in many sciences: or again the interpretation may be "gerens ardorem"—one who cultivates a burning zeal—because, being mercifully prevented by the grace of God, his inner man was inflamed by

THE LIFE OF

the love of Christ, and moved by an irresistible impulse to enhance the Glory of God: or thirdly one may say that he was rightly named Gerard as being one "gerens ardua"—cultivating that which is on high—because being wholly turned to God, he during his life did mighty and lofty deeds, lifting his mind earnestly to the contemplation of heavenly things, and by his preaching converted many peoples to the amending of their lives. His life, his words, his character, and his teaching were a light and a flame to all this land of ours: so in fact, as in name, he was "great" in the world—endowed with wealth, honour, learning, and high place: yet his greatness stood out more conspicuously from his contempt of worldliness, and his imitation of the lowly life of Jesus Christ, and also from the abundant harvest of followers whom he brought to Him, as the traces left behind him do clearly show.

(3) This man therefore shall be held in perpetual memory, a man who in our own day was a teacher, following the regulations of the orthodox faith; and one who by his pious example restored the position of our Holy Religion. Although for a long time he mixed carelessly and thoughtlessly in the concerns of this world, yet, after his conversion, his life was truly exemplary, being spent in the deepest humility and devotion, in holy poverty and frequent fasting, a life too which he ended well and with a happy issue of his strife.

GERARD THE GREAT

CHAPTER II

Of his rapid progress at the University of Paris

(1)



WHEN he was growing toward manhood, Gerard was sent by his parents to the University of Paris, and being furnished with abundant means, beyond those of many of his companions, he busied himself with those pursuits for the sake of which he had come. At that time he was not seeking the glory of Christ as the end of his studies, but pursuing the shadow of a great reputation he was chiefly anxious for the praise of men.

(2) In a short time, however, having passed through the usual course for students, he eagerly sought for higher place; and in virtue of his good understanding, a Master of Arts degree was conferred upon him in the eighteenth year of his age. Having gained this degree, and being fired by a natural genius and puffed up with worldly knowledge, he was rewarded with preferment in the Church, and received amongst other benefices a Canonry in the Church of Aix. But hitherto he walked in the broad ways of the world, not being yet inspired, until by the mercy of God he was changed into another man.

THE LIFE OF

CHAPTER III

How his conversion was revealed to a hermit in Cologne

(1)

BUT inasmuch as the Almighty and merciful God, who alone worketh great marvels, had decreed to loose this learned and most famous Master from the bonds of this present world, He brought the process of that conversion to full effect; and this conversion, unexpected and unknown to the generality of men, was beforehand revealed and foretold to a certain hermit in Cologne.

(2) For when on a time Gerard was in that city and wandering idly was watching some worldly games, the aforesaid hermit, expressly mentioning the name and describing the dress of Gerard, foretold that his conversion should shortly be brought to pass, and should be of profit to many.

Wherefore a certain man, who knew of this prophecy, came to Gerard where he was standing, and said, "Why standest thou thus intent upon empty things? Thou oughtest to become another man."

This saying about himself Gerard thought but childishness, nor did he at the time dwell much upon it; but God who hath foreknowledge of the future and doth not deceive, after a short time brought the word to pass as He had fore-ordained, and re-called to Himself Gerard whom He loved, from the paths of iniquity to the state of godly living, working by means of a Religious of the Carthusian order.

GERARD THE GREAT

CHAPTER IV

How he was drawn to God by the Carthusian

(1)



HERE was in the district of Gelders, near the city of Arnheim, a certain Religious that was Prior of the Carthusian Monastery in Monichuysen, a man of learning and piety who had formerly, when in the world, been intimate with Gerard. This man being full of compassion and drawn towards his neighbour by his zeal for souls, began to consider in what way he could have speech with Gerard and treat in private with him for his salvation, so that a man so great, and a master so learned might not perish in the world, but might be snatched from out the snares of the Devil by the aid of God and be joined to the number of the elect.

Now at that time particularly the disposition of the world seemed to be on all sides turned to evil, so that there were few who preached the Word of Life both by example and precept, and fewer still who followed the rule of continency; and this was above all things lamentable, that those who professed the name of Holy Religion and the state of the Devout Life through lack of inspiration followed but lamely in the footprints of the Fathers who had gone before. Amongst the Carthusians indeed the light of the Heavenly Life remained, though hidden; to carnal men their rule seemed to be austere enough, but yet it was most acceptable to God, and to men of fervent spirit a thing pleasant and worthy to be chosen.

THE LIFE OF

(2) Meantime it happened that for some reason which arose, the aforesaid Prior went to Utrecht, and when he knew that his beloved Gerard was there he hastened lovingly to hold converse with him; and soon, on a good opportunity, let down the net of holy exhortation to draw this great fish from the waves of worldliness.

He approached Gerard as his familiar friend, greeted him as his old comrade and exhorted him with words of wisdom as his kindly host: he spoke to him as to a man of learning of "The Sovereign Good"; he laid before him the rewards of Eternity and the terrors of the judgement to come, with mingled kindness and severity: he praised the Religious Life, and denounced the ways of the world, showing that everything beneath the sun shall perish. "Death," he said, "doth hang over every man, but the day and hour of death are unknown. But oh! how great are the gifts promised to those that follow Christ." The grace of God was present with them during this holy converse, which was oftentimes repeated; the heart of the hearer was softened, and the reverend Master believed the words spoken to him; he assented to the Prior's words as true, and was led by his reasoning; he was attracted by the promises, and confirmed by the examples of the Saints. At length he resolved to change his mode of life for a better, and by the favour of God to renounce the pomps of the world.

(3) The Prior, perceiving this, was greatly delighted in that the seed from God had fallen upon good ground: and he rejoiced with exceeding joy over this great fish which was caught by the hook of Christ to be drawn thereby the sooner from the whirlpools of the Sea. He returned joyfully to his

GERARD THE GREAT

community and rendered thanks to God from Whom is every good thing, and confessed that he himself had not framed his discourse in vain. "For," quoth he, "I have hopes that I have captured Gerard, and in regard to his conversion I have faith that he will be ready to hold to his good resolution and to prove it by his deeds." Oh! overpowering and glorious mercy of our Saviour! Oh! unspeakable virtue and grace of the Holy Ghost, which with ease can change the heart of man when He taketh up His abode therein, and doth enlighten it. This is the transforming power of the right Hand of the most High Who doeth marvels in the heaven above, and showeth signs in the earth beneath: Who driveth away the darkness and poureth light into the heart. This is the mighty power of God alone, who with the blessings of His mercy hath prevented His beloved servant, Gerard, and hath changed him from a lion into a lamb. Before time was He ordained that Gerard should be one with Himself, and in the fullness of time He hath made him ready to preach the Word of good tidings to many cities and peoples, for the glory and honour of His Holy Name.

CHAPTER V

Of his change of garb and character

(1)



NOT long afterwards, Gerard began to carry into effect that upon which of his own good will he had determined. So his mind being made sure, and confirmed in Christ, he resigned all his preferments,

THE LIFE OF

and changed his secular dress for a simple habit as befitted an humble clerk who prefers the contempt of the world before riches.

A rumour went abroad amongst the people; and many wondering at the strangeness of the matter, spoke to one another saying "What can his reason be, and what change hath befallen him; hath much learning made him mad? Lo! he who formerly went in fair clothing, now is clad in rough and sad coloured wool. He who delighted in feasting and in varied meats, doth now reject pleasant food, and seeketh poor fare; he doth flee from high place, and loveth poverty." But yet the hand of God was with him, and he began to labour faithfully in the name of the Lord.

(2) Holding the common talk and vain chatter of men in small esteem, Gerard turned himself to God with the strength of his whole heart, for he said, "I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners"; and so, God working with him, he exchanged riches for poverty, pride for humility, luxury for self-denial, unstableness for a stedfast mind, worldliness for a spiritual life, subtlety for devotion and singlemindedness. While the people were talking and wondering at the sudden change in so great a man, one of his fellow citizens who was of high position came to him secretly, wishing to know more fully the purpose of the reverend master in fleeing from the joyous companionship of the world.

(3) And when he had inquired anxiously of him about many things, and had heard fully the explanation of the mystery of Gerard's renunciation, he was so instructed in the matters of which he had doubted, that he went away greatly edified

GERARD THE GREAT

and said: "Why do these ignorant and vulgar folk speak words so senseless of this good and prudent man? Never was he so wise and full of knowledge as when of late he fled from the world and left its ways, and in an humble spirit resolved to be the servant of God. How happy would that man be who should be willing to imitate rather than to insult one who hath done so well. If he shall continue in this good course, he shall be the means of much good."

CHAPTER VI

How he separated himself from fellowship with worldlings

(1)



LEST the holy seed planted in Gerard's heart by God should be trodden under foot of them that passed by, or lying uncovered should be devoured by the fowls of the air; lest the light that was kindled in him should be extinguished by an empty wind, in place of being kept beneath a bushel and nourished by the oil of inward devotion; and lest the tender and fragile reed, being blown about by the breeze of vanity, should be soon bent earthward and not strengthened with power from on High, the humble Gerard resolved to go apart for a time, to separate himself carefully from worldly sights and converse, to release his mind from all the cares of the world, and to be at leisure for the things of God only, and for his own soul. By this means he would first learn in his own person that of which he must afterward become a teacher,

THE LIFE OF

and having tasted the sweetness of the things of God, he would more calmly bear adversity for the truth's sake, and not fear the assaults of the Devil which might be brought against him.

(2) He departed therefore from his city, and from his father's house, and came to the country of Gelders to the Carthusian Brothers in Monichuysen whom he loved in the love of Christ. By these he was received with reverence and was given a cell as being a guest worthy to be loved: and entering into it joyfully and eagerly he said in the exultation of his soul with Blessed Peter, "Lord, it is good for us to be here."

There he called back his heart from its former wanderings, there he wiped away the mildew of his old life and restored the image of his inner man to purity—there he broke the rising storms of passion by watching and by fast, and overcame the various assaults of Devils by prayer and tears, saying with Holy David, "Lo I have gone far off flying away; and I abode in the wilderness. I waited for him that hath saved me from pusillanimity of spirit and a storm." I too have seen the place of his habitation, in which this light of God, this friend of the Almighty, was hidden for a season, until he should be placed upon a candlestick, that he might show an example of light to all.

GERARD THE GREAT

CHAPTER VII

*Of his abstinence, and the shirt of hair which
he wore*

(1)



HIS new soldier of Christ therefore, fearlessly took his post in the Carthusian Camp: and within he was not overcome by the weariness of his cell, nor abroad was he broken down by the burden of his toil, but as a true son of the Cloister he kept watch over both heart and lips. Moreover he carefully tilled the field of his own heart, making a daily and rigorous inspection of the same, rooting out the thorns of vice and sowing the seeds of virtue.

So Gerard waging spiritual warfare against flesh and blood, was by his retreat strongly armed against himself that he might the more quickly overthrow the Devil, the Ruler of this world and the Prince of Darkness.

He did not pamper himself, as loving luxury, nor spare himself as being weak, nor make excuses for himself as being innocent, nor put off the time of repentance like a careless and lukewarm servant; but mindful of his former evil living, he took unto him the spirit of contrition, and for the name of Jesus, crucified his own flesh with its affections and lusts, desiring to win favour in the sight of Christ. Though his body was frail, he laid upon it frequent fasts; he abstained from flesh (as is the custom of the Carthusian order), and also from many foods which that Custom allows; he prolonged the watches of the night,

THE LIFE OF

and drove away the heaviness of sleep from his eyes by standing, by prayer and by genuflexion; and in the spirit of devotion he compelled the body to be a slave to the soul.

(2) He girt his loins with a cloth of hair which was very rough and full of knots that the wantonness of the flesh might not allure him: and he faithfully mortified the body for the soul's sake, constraining his reins with the firm strength of purity. Thus he truly, and to the very letter fulfilled the words of the prophet in the Psalm, and could justly say, "But as for me, when they were troublesome to me I was clothed with hair-cloth."

"O good Master who were they that were thine enemies in the Cloister?"

"Verily the desires of the flesh, the allurements of the world, and the temptations of the Devil."

"Wondrous is it that in this retreat where thou dwellest far from worldly things thou shouldest have temptations!"

"I am not safe, neither I nor any man who is born in sinful flesh; but that I may not be overcome of depraved affections or moved by evil example I have sought a place of solitude in the greater hope of divine protection. Even Christ Himself was never so openly tempted as when He entered into the desert and fasted from food, and yet He was not disturbed by any human passion. I, therefore, who am a sinner, that I may give the more satisfaction to my God, have withdrawn myself from men and humbled my soul with fasting that my prayer might be turned into mine own bosom."

A certain devout sister, whom Gerard had converted, told me certain things: how that after his death she saw his hair shirt, and touched it with

GERARD THE GREAT

her hands; it was very long and rough and had many knots in it for the infliction of greater punishment upon him.

CHAPTER VIII

How, by the advice of the Monks, he began to preach the word of God

(1)

BUT as the devout and learned Master continued in the increase of virtue, and in proportion as Christ grew more sweet to him so much the more did the world become of no account in his sight: and when by the ordinance of God the time of his fruit-bearing was at hand, it was determined by these wise and religious brethren that this burning and shining light should be placed upon a candlestick to give light to them that are of the household of God, in order that by the voice of his preaching, and by the example of his holy conversation he might kindle the hearts of sinners.

It would have been good that a man of such mighty power should be continually at leisure for the things of God and his own soul in the solitude of the Cloister, but they hoped to gain yet greater good and higher glory for God by sending him forth; because a learned man like Gerard who was apt for preaching but less apt for bearing the burden of a Religious order—one moreover who had learned to tread the path of humility by despising all earthly things—would be of profit to more souls by openly preaching the Word of life. By so doing he would bring the greatest gain to

THE LIFE OF

Christ and lead many with him to the eternal kingdom; and the more fervently he laboured for the salvation of souls in this present world, so much the more glorious would he be in the world to come.

(2) For three years he devoted himself to study and prayer before he began to preach; thus this faithful herald was furnished with spiritual armour, and with the writings of the Scriptures, that he might announce the good tidings of the Word of God in the cities and villages; he had many hearers both clerks and lay folk as well as the Religious Orders: men and women; small and great; learned and unlearned; men of high degree and counsellors; rulers, slaves and free; rich and poor; men of the land and strangers. When he sounded upon the trumpet of salvation withholding from the ears of his hearers no note that was necessary thereunto, but openly proclaiming the full purpose of God for all men according to their state, condition, sex and age, the hearts of many were moved to flee from before the face of the anger of God, the coming wrath of the last judgement and the final fires of Hell. He “placed the axe to the root of the tree,” according to the saying of the blessed John the Baptist—“Let all men therefore” (said he) “fear the strict judge, abandon sin, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance—let them be forward to do the will of their Holy Creator and appease Him, by being instant in prayer, almsgiving, and fasts.”

Many who heard his discourse were pricked to the heart, and coming to him yielded themselves to his direction, putting away all the vanity of the world. Some also in their zeal for chastity remained virgin, and some who had taken the vow

GERARD THE GREAT

of continency gathered together others with them for the service of God.

(3) But since the righteousness of the good suffereth the envy of evil men, some persons of corrupt mind, lovers of the world and followers of luxurious living, often spoke against Gerard, for they hated the way of truth, and were enemies of every good thing.

These persons secretly defamed the man of God, and sometimes by open railing strove to stir up a tumult against him, and that because he argued with severity against their own vices and crimes: but a yet more wicked thing was done, in that certain priests and prelates and wandering friars thought it unworthy to bear with the teaching of so great a man and with his eagerness for justice to be done upon those that deserted the holy law. They strove therefore to blacken his fame, and to fight down his constancy of purpose, of whom he himself writes in one of his letters. "Many snarling folk are come about me, who rage even as the fire among the thorns, but they do not appear openly." Wherefore this lover of Christ, this zealot for souls, was neither shaken by the threats of his enemies, nor vexed by the dispraise of them that upbraided him; for he was founded upon a strong rock because he sought not the glory of the world, nor feared to suffer shame for Christ. He was ready indeed for the truth's sake, and for the Gospel of God, to yield up both body and soul so as to promote, and wheresoever it might be, to extend His glory. And so blessed be God who raised up for us such a preacher and sent him forth to preach; for it was through him that there shone upon us who are in this lower world, the Light of the Heavenly Life.

THE LIFE OF

CHAPTER IX

Of his labours, and his patience toward his enemies

(1)



T were a long task to tell of the labours which he underwent in preaching, the conflicts of disputation which he maintained against subverters of the faith, and the exhortations which he delivered to strengthen in their holy purposes the brethren and sisters who had given themselves to the devout life. These things are most clearly shown in the letters which he wrote to divers persons for their consolation. Thus he says in one letter written to the priests in Amsterdam, who were very well known to him. "Be not afraid, my most beloved, if ye have heard my evil report from the men of Kempen. All things are turning out as I hope in accordance with the will of God. Let Charity burn within us with no sluggish flame but fiercely. Let us despise these filthy communications and be ensamples of the Most High, to the Glory of our Creator."

When he perceived that many prelates of the Church were opposed to him, and that his preaching was being hindered by the envy of his enemies, and that he was forbidden to preach by an edict craftily obtained, he yielded in a spirit of humility to this rage and envy, being unwilling to stir up a tumult amongst the people against the clergy. Moreover, he said to the common folk who took ill this inhibition as having been obtained by false-

GERARD THE GREAT

hood: "They are our prelates, and as is fitting and due we wish to obey their edicts; for we seek not to hurt any, nor to stir up a scandal. The Lord well knoweth His own whom He hath chosen from the beginning, and He will also call them by His grace, without our aid, in what manner soever He will." He therefore held his peace for a time, and meanwhile gave himself to private exhortation, counting out the riches of the Word of Consolation with an eager heart to all who came to him,—as also the blessed Paul saith:—"and I myself will be spent for your souls, seeking not what is profitable to myself but to many."

(2) He also caused several books of sacred theology to be written out by the pupils whom he attracted to him by his excellent discourses: he paid them wages, inviting them to come to his own house and hear the Word of God more often, that so he might dispose them to chastity, and to the amending of their lives, by which means they might become partakers of everlasting blessedness, being fashioned to a new and holy life, if they should renounce worldly courses. Meanwhile with Godly prudence he did not pay all their wages at one time, but divided the money into several portions, in order that they might often come, and with such opportunities for intercourse with him might find grace; and these men came the more gladly as they saw beneficent acts of holiness abounding in him—for Gerard earnestly strove to win some of these writers to Christ, a purpose which by the favour of God was shortly brought to pass. He loved to speak with such simple-minded and less learned men rather than with the wise of the world, because the innocent and the

THE LIFE OF

needy for the most part give place to the purposes of God more readily than the worldly-wise who trust in their own wisdom. For which things' sake the prophet David said, "The innocent and the upright have adhered to me because I have waited on Thee."

(3) A certain man of the order of mendicants, a Religious in garb, but a worker of mischief in speech, began to speak against the venerable Master in many things, and when he could not overcome him, he hastened to the Curia at Rome to bring a suit against this man of God, or by some other crafty device to impose silence upon him: which thing he would have feared to do if he had been moved by the Spirit of God: but the Just Judge, the Lover of peace, ordered things otherwise than as this turbulent person had expected, for being suddenly smitten by sickness while upon his journey, he died; and his whole device fell to the ground and came to naught.

There was another man of the order of preachers who was eloquent in discourse and had the fame and dignity of one in great esteem. This man having heard of the bright reputation of the venerable Master, rejoiced with exceeding charity thereupon, and congratulated Gerard with sincerity of mind. He sent him a friendly letter composed in elegant language, speaking highly of the good work which Gerard had begun, and urging him not to be broken down by the assaults of forward men, but to trust in God and stand firm, and to refresh Christian people with yet more copious draughts of the water that floweth from Heaven. Having heard this and having read the letter, the Master, who was tried in many things, embraced the writer, his fellow-worker in holy exhortation,

GERARD THE GREAT

with the arms of charity, and was strengthened by his letter, as by an oracle of God, for the work of preaching.

CHAPTER X

Of his journey to the parts about Brabant

(1)



HE pious and humble Master Gerard, hearing of the great and widespread fame of John Ruysbroek, a monk and Prior of the Monastery of Grünthal, near Brussels, went to the parts about Brabant, although the journey was long, in order to see in bodily presence this holy and most devout father; for he longed to see face to face, and with his own eyes, one whom he had known hitherto only by common report and by his books; and to hear with his own ears that voice utter its words from a living human mouth—a voice as gracious as if it were the very mouthpiece of the Holy Ghost, He took with him therefore that revered man Master John Cele, the director of the School of Zwolle, a devout and faithful lover of Jesus Christ; for their mind and heart were at one in the Lord, and the fellowship of each was pleasant to the other, and this resolve was kindled within them that their journey, which was undertaken for the sake of spiritual edification, should redound in the case of each to the Glory of God.

(2) There went also with them a faithful and devout layman, named Gerard the shoemaker, as their guide upon the narrow way, and their inseparable companion in this happy undertaking.

When they came to the place called Grünthal,

THE LIFE OF

they saw no lofty or elaborate buildings therein, but rather all the signs of simplicity of life and poverty, such as marked the first footsteps of our Heavenly King when He, the Lord of Heaven, came upon this earth as a Virgin's Son, and in exceeding poverty. As they entered the gate of the monastery, that holy father, the devout Prior, met them, being a man of great age, of kindly serenity, and one to be revered for his honourable character. He it was whom they had come to see, and saluting them with the greatest benignity as they advanced, and being taught by a revelation from God, he called upon Gerard by his very name and knew him, though he had never seen him before. After this salutation he took them with him into the inner parts of the cloister, as his most honoured guests, and with a cheerful countenance, and a heart yet more joyful showed them all due courtesy and kindness as if he were entertaining Jesus Christ Himself.

(3) Gerard abode there for a few days conferring with this man of God about the Holy Scriptures; and from him he heard many heavenly secrets which, as he confessed, were past his understanding, so that in amazement he said, with the Queen of Sheba, "O excellent father, thy wisdom and thy knowledge exceedeth the fame which I heard in mine own land; for by thy virtues thou hast surpassed thy fame." After this he returned with his companions to his own city greatly edified; and being as it were a purified creature, he pondered over what he had heard in his mind, and often dwelt thereon in his heart: also he committed some of Ruysbroek's sayings to writing, that they might not be forgotten.

God also revealed to Gerard the death of this

GERARD THE GREAT

most beloved father, which revelation he made manifest in the hearing of many of the citizens by the tolling of the bells: and more privately, showed to certain of his friends that the soul of the Prior, after but one hour of Purgatory had passed to the glory of heaven.

Gerard himself did not long survive, for when the third year after these things was almost past, there came the time appointed for him to die, and at the call of God he paid the debt of the flesh.

This sojourn on his visit to the Prior was not a time of idleness, nor was the discourse of so holy a father barren; but the instruction of his living voice gave nurture to a fuller love, and an increase of fresh zeal, as he testifies in a letter which he sent to these same brethren in the Grünthal, saying: "I earnestly desire to be commended to your director and Prior, the footstool of whose feet I would fain be both in this life, and in the life to come; for my heart is welded to him beyond all other men by love and reverence. I do still burn and sigh for your presence, to be renewed and inspired by your spirit and to be a partaker thereof."

CHAPTER XI

Of his austerity in food and clothing

(1)



WILL describe in a few words the manner of his private life, for he laid down for himself a rule, and has described in his writings many exercises of devotion.

He was very temperate in the matter of food,

THE LIFE OF

and it was his custom to be satisfied almost always with but one meal in the day. He so regulated his need of sleep, that he thought that seven hours of rest were enough. He would not eat, save in his own house, by whomsoever he might be invited, for he avoided intercourse with worldly men and also those lengthy banquets in which rich men indulge themselves to the loss of the poor. So strictly did he abide by his rule, that none dared to invite him or to trouble him with importunities: and this rule being well known was so pleasing to the good as to take away any handle of malicious accusation from the wicked.

Nevertheless he invited to his frugal table certain poor servants of God, and sometimes one or two of the honourable burghers, so as to instruct them in a better life: and these he regaled rather with the sweets of heavenly discourse than with carefully prepared courses of meats, for such he by no means provided. But whether he were alone, or were entertaining a guest, the reading of some holy book preceded the meal, and edifying discourse flowed from his honeyed tongue; but on other matters he strictly held his peace.

(2) Laughter and jesting were far removed from his mouth, and still farther the blemishes of slanderous talk and worldly gossip which pertained not to the matter in hand. His conversation was seasoned with salt, and thoughts of devotion to God, and the health of the soul gave to his food a savour beyond that of any pleasant meat. He ever remembered as he sat at meat the heavenly table in the kingdom of God, and the sweet fellowship of the Saints which should follow our long exile in this present world. Thus he sent away his guests joyful in the Lord, and having their hearts

GERARD THE GREAT

pricked. He had a refectory of modest size, in which a few guests could sit with him, where near at hand and over against the table there stood a case filled with most excellent books to serve as it were for a wine-cellar, so that if the fare for the body were not pleasing, he might from this abundant supply put before his friends a draught of wine for the soul. He often ate food that was unseasoned or burned, and that not with impatience, but with giving of thanks, and as discharging the debt and paying the penalty for his former sumptuous living.

(3) He used to prepare his food with his own hands, though he had no skill in cookery, and he refused to accept the services of the sisters who dwelt apart in a neighbouring building: if anything needed to be bought in the market, these looked to it for him; but he allowed no one of them to enter into his dwelling, but was content with the ministrations of a single clerk. Both within his house and abroad he arranged everything with a view to honesty and good report, and lest aught that might cause suspicion should be observed, he would not speak to any one of the nuns, save behind a closed and curtained window. Things that were given him, or brought for his use, were pushed in by means of a wheeled vehicle—wherefore one of his pupils, seeing him so closely guarded, inquired privately of him concerning the matter, and said:

“Why, good master, dost thou so carefully veil thy window?” and Gerard answered, “If I could, I would protect mine ears also that I might not hear the voices of women, for indeed excess of caution can do us no hurt; every cause of stumbling and danger to the weak cometh by lack of

THE LIFE OF

guard over the bodily sense, and from too much freedom of intercourse. He, therefore, that would preserve his integrity, let him keep his eyes and his ears in subjection, for only upon urgent necessity should one be so indiscreet as to speak with a woman."

(4) He observed with the greatest strictness the fasts of Holy Church. On Fridays he abstained altogether from foods made with milk, and often on that day used salt as a condiment instead of oil. He seldom washed his plate, but wiped it with bread, or left it for a dog or for mice to lick, and he did not despise mouldy bread. On the fifth day of the week by reason of the coming Friday he washed all his vessels in water, to remove from them every trace of fat by way of penance. Therefore he was pleasing in the sight of God, by being content with the simple and bare necessaries of life, by cutting off what is superfluous and not requiring luxuries. Towards himself he was austere and churlish, towards others kindly and pitiful.

(5) His garb was gray in colour and made in humble fashion, being neither soft nor gay, nor arranged in elaborate folds, and he seldom had new garments, for when his clothes were worn by age he had them patched and mended, nor was he ashamed, although a man of good birth, to be seen amongst his friends and fellow-citizens in vile raiment. He wore a tattered cloak mended with many patches, like to those worn by the poor and by beggars: a garment like to be despised by the rich, but a pattern to the devout, and worthy to be held in pious memory by them that come after. None of his raiment indeed was of great price, yet his merit in wearing the same was by

GERARD THE GREAT

no means small. All his adorning was the inner adorning of the heart, wherefore he looked not to the aspect of his outer man: and now he rejoiced to be clad in garments which once he would have thought scarce worth a glance. Oh! noble man, who wast not clad in soft raiment, but like John wast girt with a rough shirt of hair, and, like Christ, robed in the cloak of holy poverty.

(6) He was asked once by a familiar friend why he wore so old and patched a garment, which any labouring man might blush to wear, and he replied in his own gracious and pleasant manner: "In this I look to mine own convenience; the patches are there to prevent me from suffering cold, and that the wind may not blow through the rents, as it would if they were not closed up." The brother hearing this was greatly edified, perceiving that Gerard sought not to please the world, but rather God only. He was also asked about his cloak and doublet, how old they were, to which he replied: "This thicker garment which I wear outside, is more than nine years old, but this thinner one, which I wear beneath it, I have had for two years only." "And how long," said his questioner, "hast thou worn thy doublet?" To which Gerard replied, "One of them is twelve years old, the other only three." Thus he could say with holy David in his faithful prayers to God, "See my abjection and my labour, and forgive me all my sins."

(7) The humble Master following after poverty, remembered what manner of man he had been while in the world when he had loved luxury; wherefore it behoved him in justice to make amends for his former courses by the opposite manner of living; of old he used to go forth clad in fair attire and

THE LIFE OF

with a silver girdle: and while among the canons, he had worn a sumptuous surplice and a fair almuce: likewise he had indulged his body with delicate food and with costly wines; but afterward being changed into another man, he did not suffer his former indulgences to go unpunished. He prostrated himself beneath the feet not only of his elders and men in high esteem, but also beneath those of the youngest lay folk, sometimes eating in their presence upon the bare earth, for he said, "I am not worthy to sit at meat with you, for I am a sinner beyond all men and have offended God." He who had been wont to anoint his head, and delicately to tire his hair, would afterward in his own despite wear an old moth-eaten biretta which was pierced with near to an hundred holes. Thus he did great violence upon himself, subdued the flesh, despised the world and bruised the head of the old Serpent, not permitting his passions to rule over him. He ever walked upon the path of humility under the leadership of Christ, and conformed his life by rule to the pattern of the Saints of old.

CHAPTER XII

*Of his devoutness in prayer and in hearing
Holy things*

(1)



HO can tell how devout and fervent he showed himself in prayer? Often while reciting the "Hours" he broke forth with the voice of joy through the superabundance of grace which was shed upon him, and in sweet sounding hymns

GERARD THE GREAT

poured forth his inward rejoicing; and as he sang softly within his heart, his spirit, as a flame, was borne upward to God. He had more delight in holy discourse and devout prayer than he had had of old in worldly revellings or in the varied strains of singing men. He had one John of Zutphen to minister to him, who was surnamed Brinckerinc, a devout clerk of stablished character and one dedicated to God from his youth: he was wont to recite the "Hours" with Gerard, and to accompany him hither and thither when he preached, and Gerard loved him with the love of a father for his son, for indeed he was a youth of an excellent spirit, well beloved of God and man, and scarcely could be torn from his master's side.

(2) Upon a time when they had made an end of reading the "Hours," Gerard said to him: "Of what thinkest thou? Understandest thou what thou readest? Tell me what is in thy mind." But he replied to his master: "How should I understand except some man should guide me." Then said Gerard to his disciple: "To me there come divers and mystic interpretations, and they lead my mind secretly from one meaning to another so that I could feel no weariness in reading, but should rejoice to dwell some while longer upon these good words." When he was upon a journey and had been received into a guest chamber, after saying Compline he spoke to his two companions, Florentius and the aforesaid John: "Let us say each one of us our daily suffrages"; and this too was a pious custom with them, that each one should tell the other of his own failings if he had seen anything worthy of blame in himself: they freely admonished one another in turn, gladly submitting themselves to censure, and acknow-

THE LIFE OF

ledging their sins with humility asked pardon therefor; and being thus corrected in brotherly love, they went to rest.

(3) Once when the people of Deventer were going out armed against their enemies, this man of God prayed earnestly for the safety of his fellow citizens, and it happened by a dispensation of God that as the foe drew near, a thick cloud rose between the armies by which the opposing host was terrified and took to flight, but the men of Deventer returned to their city with speed and in safety—for the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Every morning before he began to be about his worldly business, or to reply to those who questioned him, he would rekindle his mind by reading the Scriptures, for he ever studied to preface all that he should do with devout meditations and prayers according to that saying of the Psalmist: “My eyes to Thee have prevented the morning that I might meditate on thy words.”

(4) It was his rule to hear Mass daily with deep reverence and due devotion, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and afterward devoting himself to the service of his neighbour, thus in this twofold duty he held to the right path, as it is said in the book of Canticles: “He set in order charity in me.” When he entered a Church he did not stand up to gaze upon the painted windows in the walls overhead, but bent the knee with humility before God, and prostrated himself in prayer; and he would hold no converse there, but delighted only to hear the praises of God, or to read the “Hours,” for he avoided every idle word in the Temple of the Almighty. Lest his devotion might be disturbed by the concourse of

GERARD THE GREAT

men, or his secret converse with God be observed of bystanders, he secured a secluded and private place among the Friars-minor, and there alone and in secret he lay prostrate in prayer, gazing upon and adoring the Holy Sacrament of the Altar: for there was a small window through which the several altars could be seen. Here with prayers and groaning he knocked at the gate of Heaven, beating upon his breast most grievously, like the Publican, beseeching God to be propitious to him, and to pardon his past sins; to cleanse him from evil and the passions which threatened him; and to protect him from further perils by the bestowal of His Fatherly care, as in times past.

(5) He was so eminent for devotion and meditation as to earn the comfort of a revelation from God, and the instruction of a spirit of prophecy as to future events. Thus he consoled one of his pupils, who was sad by reason of the long continued absence of a brother, with the tidings that he should soon come to him, "for thy brother is well," said Gerard, "and will come shortly"; and so it came to pass. He also foretold of certain brothers who clung to him, that some of them should be promoted to the priesthood and some should take upon them the profession of the Religious Life. Once, being inflamed by a mighty longing for Eternal Life, he said to one of his pupils: "What further can I do here? would that I were with my Lord in Heaven"; and the brother answered him, saying: "Beloved Master, we cannot yet do without thy presence; who would instruct us as thou dost, and strive so earnestly on our behalf? We are few and feeble, and these worldlings perchance might soon put us to rout"; but

THE LIFE OF

Gerard again confidently affirmed: "I will ask the Father for you, that your devotion fail not, for it is a tree that the Lord hath planted upon this earth; I hope that this small beginning shall come to a great issue. God of His goodness shall provide for Himself another fitting man instead of me, who without doubt shall take his place as a buttress to the House of the Lord.

CHAPTER XIII

Of his great love of reading the Holy Scriptures

(1)



HIS reverend doctor was possessed by a great love of reading the Holy Scriptures, and by an untiring zeal in collecting the books of learned men rather than treasures of money, whereof he bears witness in a letter, saying: "I am ever covetous, yea, more than covetous, of books, and if I lack them I am useless"; for although he was more learned than many doctors, he did not desire honour on that account, but he was the comforter of them that sorrowed, and ever the faithful helper of all who wished to serve God. He was instant in searching again and again the passages that he had read, and to dark sayings he gave yet more careful study so as to become continually better and more apt to take hold upon holy things. He was not ashamed to learn from younger men, nor to ask them questions, for he knew that which is written: "The declaration of Thy words giveth light, and giveth understanding to little ones"; wherefore he showed himself right easy of access

GERARD THE GREAT

and kindly to such men, and indeed chose rather to seek counsel from another, than to work out by himself many interpretations; for he said: "If a boy can teach me a fuller knowledge of the will of God, how much more gladly would I listen to him, rather than strive after some new doctrine by myself and without counsel from any man."

(2) He was therefore earnest in reading the Scriptures, but was not careful to possess books beautifully adorned; the Breviary from which he read his "Hours" was of no great value since he avoided using anything that was outwardly splendid or that savoured not of simplicity: so when he saw one who had a book sumptuously ornamented, and noted how carefully the owner looked to it and turned the leaves, he said to him: "I had rather that a book were my servant, than be servant to a book; books should serve the interests of their reader's mind, not the nice taste of him who doth look at them"; for this reason the devout master gave more attention to the matter of a book than to the outward beauty of an embellished copy; so, too, the Blessed Jerome preferred to have a well corrected text, though the form of the book might be of small value, rather than a beautifully ornamented but incorrect copy. Yet it is a decent custom and to be commended as tending to the honour of God, and to the adornment of His Church which flourisheth over all the world, that the books of Holy Scripture, and those that are used in Divine Service should be somewhat sumptuously written, and be preserved from all taint of dust and defilement. So may they minister to many that are faithful in the peace of the Catholic Faith both of this and coming generations; and may stir the dull of heart to read

THE LIFE OF

more earnestly; and the books shall abide long with us because they are known to have been bought at a great price, and to have been written with great labour.

(3) He was not only assiduous in reading the sacred books, but also wrote carefully, and published at the earnest desire of others, certain short works based upon the genuine sayings of the Saints for the use of them who sought his guidance, that he might teach those whom he could not reach in person and instruct by word of mouth. Amongst other works he wrote several notable letters, a collection of which is preserved and read for a worthy memorial of him. He had knowledge of all the liberal arts conjoined to a close acquaintance with Holy Scripture; a natural genius which was very keen and adorned by the light of the grace of God: a skilful tongue, fluent eloquence in exhortation, and a tenacious memory; so that there was scarcely known his equal in so many branches of knowledge or one so earnest and devout in holy conversation. Yet illustrious as he was for his special knowledge in matters of learning both human and divine, he was none the less humble and submissive in rendering honour to his superiors and to rulers of the Church. He was well disposed to study the simple and devout words of others: in speech he was circumspect; in writing, ready; in self-examination, scrupulous; in business committed to him, prompt and faithful. Lest he should forget what he ought to do or say when occasion came, he used to write at once upon the blank leaves or margins of his books and pamphlets clear notes upon the business in hand. Thus he kept carefully in readiness full records of all that he said for the overthrowing

GERARD THE GREAT

of the envious who were ever laying snares for him in many ways; and this he did that he might have at hand matter wherewith to answer the snarls of his detractors, should any necessity arise.

(4) A certain prelate of the Church, an enemy to Gerard, disputed with him, and argued against some of his writings as if the master were less wise than he: for he himself did not perceive by what a plague of jealousy he was troubled. Then the man of God, knowing his own innocence, brought forward a great number of his letters, asserting that those things which were objected against him were not written by him, nor did they agree with what he had written. "Consider, Sirs," said he, "what sort of letters ye have received or sent: lo! here is the full number and collection of letters which I have written with mine own hand—as these speak, so speak I—these I maintain and for these I answer"; and by the ready production of these letters the mouth of him that spoke evil of Gerard was stopped; and the famous master by his assertion of the Truth, was promoted to even greater honour in the minds of many who stood by. For the truth shall always prevail, though it is often spoken against by the ignorant.

(5) It is said that Gerard had been skilled in astrology and necromancy, and before his conversion had been in the habit of displaying some few of the tricks of the art of magic: but I have learned from two of his pupils that more than these cannot be charged to him, for when one of these pupils asked him the truth of the matter, he said: "I did indeed learn the theory of that art, and I read and possessed books upon it, but I had no dealings with the follies of magical prac-

THE LIFE OF

tice." Moreover a faithful pupil of Gerard, who was also a devout priest, added for my further information on this questionable matter the following explanation. "There are," he said, "two kinds of necromancy, of which one is called 'natural.' This kind is a most recondite study, and its difference from the second kind (which is called 'diabolic' and is forbidden by law), is perceived by but few persons. Gerard was learned in the natural kind, but I believe that he had not studied the other, nor had made any compact with the Devil." But in what way soever his connection with this science came about, and whether he had dealings or commerce therewith in jest or in earnest, he washed away and purged any foolishness or defilement that might have clung to him therefrom, by bringing forth fruits meet for repentance when he was wholly turned to God. In witness of this when smitten with sickness he renounced all unlawful arts in the presence of a priest, and gave the books that dealt of such vanities to be burned in the fire.

(6) Let us recognize in all these things the immeasurable depth of the Fatherly love of God; and see how the Almighty doth suffer some men to be ensnared by the more grievous sins and by wrongful habits, but at length of His secret purposes, making manifest a yet greater compassion for them, doth restore to life those that were lost, and raiseth the fallen to repentance. He doth grant them not only pardon for past sins, but also a store of higher grace when they are wholly turned to Him, and are striving to be profitable servants. He knoweth how to convert the provocations devised by the Devil for the confusion and ruin of man, into means of earning a crown of greater

GERARD THE GREAT

glory. If there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth, how great a joy must there have been over Gerard, who not only repented of his own sins, but also by his example and precept turned so many other sinners to repentance, and laboured to draw a great company of faithful people to the Kingdom of Heaven.

CHAPTER XIV

Of the abundant fruit which he bore in the conversion of men

(1)



INASMUCH as every tree is known by his fruit, as Christ Himself beareth witness, I must now declare how rich and how abundant were the fruits of godliness which this tree bore during the short season of his preaching. I think that venerable and learned Master is worthy to be compared to three trees above all others; to the fertile olive, to the lofty cedar, and to the flourishing palm. For he, being planted like a fruitful tree by the water side, brought forth in his season most excellent increase to God. Moreover, as a stream running over with the waters of the Scriptures, he irrigated the vineyard of the Lord God of Sabaoth abundantly, whence the clusters of devout life, and the green leaves of good works were increased to the Glory of God our Saviour. This man of God was no barren stock, nor a forest tree whose leaf falleth, like the oak; but in very truth he flourished abundantly, like some fair olive in the field, as a noble cedar aloft in Libanus, and as a goodly palm

THE LIFE OF

upon the hill of Zion. The merciful God bestowed great grace upon him, which he received not with an empty heart, but used the same to the bringing forth of good works; he, therefore, who had been aforetime an occasion of error to many and a companion of the foolish, now became an ensample of virtue to all. The more he perceived how grievously he had erred in the paths of evil, so much the more humble did he now become, and the more zealous to tread in the right way. Wherefore being renewed and set on fire by the Spirit of God he was instant to be more diligent in works of mercy, in succouring his neighbours (being moved thereto by deep compassion); in preaching the Word of Salvation to the peoples; in administering, like a holy physician of souls, the comfort of Divine consolation to the sorrowful and the tempted: and in recalling back-sliders to their former earnestness of mind by frequent exhortation, prayer and lamentation.

(2) Because he had obtained great mercy from the Lord, and with true charity was eager to share the same liberally, and whensoever he could, with his neighbour, he might justly say with the holy poet David: "But I have borne fruit like an olive tree in the house of the Lord: I have hoped in the Mercy of God for ever." He was not hard of heart and pitiless like that wicked servant who, though all his own debt was forgiven him, had not compassion upon his fellow servant: but from the beginning of his conversion, he forgave every debt of those that trespassed against him; prayed earnestly for those that slandered him; was ready to be beforehand in giving satisfaction if he had offended any, and to live peaceably with all so that the defence of the Truth were not endangered.

GERARD THE GREAT

Nor did he, like that slothful servant, hide his Lord's money, looking only to his own convenience; but the gift of learning, and that talent which was entrusted to him he faithfully put out to earn an usury of souls. Rightly then is he compared to a fruitful olive, for he poured forth upon his neighbour in holy abundance the oil of mercy which he had received from God. But he put on bowels of mercy chiefly toward indigent clerks, lone widows, and virgins who preserved their chastity, and upon these he expended the anxious care of a father; also he studied to minister to the necessities of them that lacked both by his own efforts and through others, giving them whatsoever help and consolation he could.

(3) With reason, too, is he compared to a lofty cedar that groweth upward, because by his contempt of all earthly things and his contemplation of the Eternal, he grew toward Heaven: and knowing his own frailty, he rooted his heart in the depths of humility, and in proportion as his roots became finer and more deeply planted, so did he spread the more widely above. Although he was endowed with so much knowledge, and was in so great reputation with the famous doctors of his time, he nevertheless despised every pinnacle of worldly honour, and kept himself simple in bearing, so that anyone who did not know him would scarcely have given heed to, or saluted him.

Well, too, is the Master likened to a flourishing palm tree, for with the leaves of this were victors and fighters of old wont to be crowned; and, like them, Gerard strove against and overcame his enemies, that is, men guilty of heresies, simony, usury, self-seeking, lust, and the other various monsters of wickedness, enduring many labours

THE LIFE OF

and using the writings of the Scriptures as the weapons wherewith he was armed. Therefore was he worthy to be crowned with the palm of everlasting bliss, and to be commended of faithful people with due reverence and praise. Behold him! an Israelite indeed, a most devoted preacher and champion of sound doctrine: one who so loved God as not to neglect his neighbour: who so lifted his mind to the things of Heaven as not to be backward in ministering to the necessities of others, who moreover busied himself in looking not to his own salvation only but to the weal of many, and in leading them with him to the more perfect life.

(4) He was of a cheerful countenance, and in speech kindly; calm in mind and humble in clothing; in food abstinent, in counsel wise, in judgment discreet. Towards evil he was stern, toward virtue zealous. Fleeing from idleness he ever exercised himself with something profitable to edification: he loved simplicity and followed lowliness, thinking upon heavenly things. He was apt to understand hidden matters, and was never too much occupied for reading and prayer. Having God ever before his eyes he jealously guarded the rights of the Church. He set a good example to men of the world, seeking no temporal advantage from his preaching, thinking only of the profit of souls, and preaching the Gospel without price and without money from the Church. Thus though his life was not long, nor crowned with age, yet in his short season he brought forth abundant fruit by his preaching, and left behind him in divers places most devout disciples and brothers whom he had first faithfully built up and set on fire by the grace of that new light wherewith he himself was filled.

GERARD THE GREAT

CHAPTER XV

*Of the devout communities and monasteries
which arose through him*

(1)



HE everlasting wisdom of the Father, and His mercy from on High provided that there should be sent so great and good a man as Gerard as an ambassador from Heaven to a world which was now growing old and ever turning to yet more evil courses: one who had put on the breastplate of faith and was sustained by righteousness of life, so that, through him, Holy Religion might be made to flourish again, and the devotion of Christian people, being oft instructed by his discourses, might again grow warm, continue in the worship of God and the observance of His commandments, and show works of mercy toward the poor. To resist the malice of so many enemies, and to call souls that were perishing out of the deep darkness of sin into the light of Truth should seem to be a work for no unskilled man; but Gerard was deeply learned, one, moreover, who had made trial of many things, and to him the Grace of God gave the power of the word: for he was most fully instructed in heavenly doctrine and excelled other men in the virtue of his life: thus he was able to persuade his hearers to despise the world not only by words of human wisdom but even more by the example of his godly conversation.

Such was the inclination amongst the people to hear the Word of God, that the Church could scarcely contain the crowd that came together.

THE LIFE OF

Many left their food, and being drawn by an hunger after righteousness postponed their urgent business and ran together to hear his discourses: he often delivered two sermons in one day, and sometimes continued preaching for three hours or more when fervency of spirit took hold upon him. He preached in the chief cities of the diocese of Utrecht, Deventer and Zwolle; in Kempen often, and in Utrecht itself before the assembled clergy; in the country of Holland at Leyden, Delft and Ghent; in Amsterdam (where he delivered his first sermon in the vulgar tongue) and in various other towns and well-known villages where he hoped to gather fruit and to bring forth new children for God. Blessed be God, Who sending His Holy Spirit from Above kindled the hearts of His faithful people, and mightily increased them, so that from the seed of a few converts there grew many companies of devout brethren and sisters who served God in chastity; and to them several monasteries of monks and holy nuns owed the origin of their Godly life.

(2) It is the great glory of Master Gerard that by his preaching so great a tree was planted and watered, a tree which after his death, though but newly set in the ground, ceased not to flourish in the field of the Lord. Although this religious order and these communities of devout persons were first planted in the nearer parts of Holland, Gelders and Brabant, they afterwards spread rapidly to the more remote regions of Flanders, Frisia, Westphalia and Saxony, for God prospered them, and the sweet savour of their good reputation reached even to the Apostolic See.

Now the venerable Master Gerard, being filled with the Holy Ghost, and perceiving that by little

GERARD THE GREAT

and little the number of his disciples was increasing, and that they were burning with zeal for heavenly warfare, took due care and forethought that the devout might come together from time to time into one house for mutual exhortation, and that they might deal faithfully with one another of the things pertaining to God and to the keeping of the law of Charity: and he ordained that if any should wish to abide continually together, they should earn their own living by the labour of their hands, and, as far as might be, live in common under the discipline of the Church. He allowed none to beg in the public ways unless compelled by evident necessity, nor toilsomely to go round from house to house to obtain alms, but rather he ordered them to remain at home, and, as St. Paul taught, to be diligent in the labour of their hands, but not to engage in any business which might hinder their devotion in the hope of greater gain, lest at the instigation of the Devil there might be given to the weak some occasion of falling back into their former naughty ways.

(3) He had it in mind to build a Monastery for Clerks of the order of Regular Canons, for he wished to move some of those Clerks who followed him and were fitted for such a life, to take the Religious habit in order that they might serve as an example to other devout persons, and show the way of holiness to any clerks or lay folk that came from elsewhere.

He was moved to institute this religious order chiefly by the especial love and reverence he had for that venerable John Ruysbroek, the first prior of Grünthal, and for the other brethren in the same place, who lived the Religious life and were without reproach. These were they whom he had

THE LIFE OF

visited in person in Brabant; in them he observed and from them derived, a mode of life greatly tending to edification by reason of their deep humility and the wearing of a simple garb.

But although he busied himself with all diligence to find a place and a monastery fitted for the Religious Life, he could not accomplish the end which he desired, for death was beforehand with him; yet in the sight of God the King immortal, invisible, the Founder of all things, the intention was counted as if it were the fulfilment of his design, and he bequeathed his desire to build a religious house to those most beloved disciples whom he had converted, exhorting them not to let so great a purpose fall into forgetfulness when he was dead, but to unite in lending their aid and counsel in carrying it out so as to further the Glory of God. Some of these disciples were they who dwelt in the Monastery of Windesheim, and also they who with the help of God first founded the house of Agnietenburg near Zwolle.

CHAPTER XVI

Of his happy death and burial

(1)



HIS faithful and prudent servant of the Lord perceiving that the end of his days was at hand—for he was smitten by the bolt that must fall upon all men—asked for and received the Viaticum of Salvation. He bore with patience the stroke from the Hand of the Lord, and like the elect, strove not to avoid His scourge, knowing that the more

GERARD THE GREAT

humbly and gladly he bore this present chastisement, the more readily should he appease the wrath of the Judge Almighty. Resigning himself therefore wholly to the Divine Will, and readily submitting himself to the ordinance from above, he committed the issue of his strife to God in faith and spoke these few words to the brethren who stood about him:

“Lo! I am called of the Lord, and the time of my dissolution is at hand. Augustine and Bernard are knocking at the door; and I may not go beyond the bounds which God hath set to my life. I must pay the debt of the flesh like other mortals; may God protect my going forth, and may my spirit return to Him Who gave it; let the earth cover this poor body which was taken from it, but might not long abide thereon; and may He for Whose love I have laboured, written, and preached, grant that I find peace after death.”

(2) But his disciples were grieved to the heart, and said to him with bitter sighing: “What shall we do from henceforth, and who shall teach us in time to come? Thou hast been our father and our defender, and hast drawn us to God. Now shall our adversaries rejoice, and they of the world shall laugh us to scorn, saying: “These have no leader nor chief, therefore shall they soon be brought to naught.” If when thou wert here they dared to mock us and speak evil of us, what shall they do when thou art gone? Let prayers for us fall from thy lips, and bring aid speedily to the sons whom thou dost leave behind. Through thy counsel have we begun to amend; help us that we may persevere.”

The good and pitiful Master, seeing that the hearts of his sons were in heavy sorrow for his

THE LIFE OF

departure, gave them kindly comfort, saying: "Have faith in God, my most beloved, nor fear them of the world that prate against you. Stand firm in your holy purpose, for God shall be with you where ye are; man shall not prevail to break down that which God hath determined shall be builded. So soon as I am come to God, I hope I shall cast down upon you flowers out of Heaven, that ye may know the Grace of God and produce fruit in the world; and to Him and to His saints do I commend you all."

(3) "Behold Florentius, my beloved disciple, in whom the Holy Spirit hath found a resting place, shall be to you a father and ruler. Take him in my stead, hear him, and obey his counsel. I know none like him, none whom I esteem so highly, or in whom I have such confidence. Him must ye love and reverence as a father."

Thus with kindly words did he comfort his disciples in their bitter grief, promising that the help of God should be most surely with them. As a bequest he left them neither gold nor silver nor rich estates, but only his holy books, his few poor garments, and some worthless and ancient vessels in token of his contempt of the world, and to help them the more easily to strive after the Kingdom of God.

At this time there came also to him certain devout scholars who had been smitten with the sickness of the Plague, desiring to hear from him some wholesome word as a medicine for their souls. To these he spoke with clemency, saying: "By continuing ever in the Service of God, if ye are well disposed thereunto, ye can meet death with confidence; all those lectures which ye have heard shall be counted to you as prayers to God,

GERARD THE GREAT

by reason of the pious intention which ye have had toward Him in your studies.”

Hearing this the young men were comforted, and returning to their own hospice, departed this life having made a good confession, commending their souls, which were redeemed by the Blood of Christ, to God and to the Holy Angels.

(4) After the Festival of the Assumption of the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, when the Feastday of St. Bernard (to whom Gerard was especially devoted) had dawned, this reverend father, then in the forty-fourth year of his age, delivered up to God his soul fortified by the Sacraments of the Church, made precious by faith, and ennobled by many virtues. He died as the sun was sinking, between the fifth and sixth hours in the thirteen hundred and eighty-fourth year after our Lord's Incarnation, during the reign of Pope Urban the Sixth, and while that most revered lord Florentius de Wevelichoven was Bishop of Utrecht, a notable man and adorned by many excellent deeds.

(5) When the sad report of his death went forth to the people, many faithful persons came together to attend the burying of a man so worthy of love, and so devoted to God: and the monks and nuns shed pious tears performing the due rites for the departed, with prayer and the celebration of Masses according to custom. Every rite of the Church being duly performed, his body was carried to the Church of the Blessed Mary, and was reverently buried therein, where, as all men know, his living voice had often preached the Word of God. There he rests in peace, not far from the Sanctuary, to rise with the rest of the faithful on the last day, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord who shall

THE LIFE OF

judge both the quick and the dead, and this world with fire.

These words concerning a few out of the many glorious acts of the reverend Master Gerard have been written for the edification of the brethren who now are, or in time to come shall be, of our community: may they tend to the Glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I ask pardon for any error or defect in my discourse, for I know mine own unskilfulness and submit myself humbly to the correction of the brethren, attributing to the Grace of God any good thing that may be found herein written.

(6) (*A novice speaks*)

“Most gladly do I hear these things, and feel that as it were a new spirit of devotion is born in me thereby. Oh! that many Masters like to him could now be found, who should be constrained to inform the Church of God by their excellent example and doctrine. Therefore I shall hold in greater reverence and love this noble man who hath been until now unknown to me: and where-soever I shall find treatises written by him or concerning his deeds, I shall take heed to read the same carefully and diligently to search them out. But I pray if thou dost know any other memorable things concerning him, that thou wilt impart them to me before thou dost go forward to further matters.”

(7) (*The elder Brother answers him.*)

“Although I am hastening to write of other things, yet that I may satisfy thy longing by a few words, hear now what a doctor of Theology, a Cantor at Paris, who formerly knew Gerard well, writes about him, and with how great praise he lauds him now that he is dead.”

GERARD THE GREAT

CHAPTER XVII

*Of the noble eulogy passed upon Gerard by a
Cantor at Paris*

(1)



MASTER GERARD of holy memory, he who was called "The Great," has passed happily to the Lord. Truly he was "The Great," for in his knowledge of all the liberal sciences, both natural and moral, of civil law, canon law and of theology, he was second to no one in the world, and all these branches of learning were united in him.

He was a man of such saintliness and gave so good an example in his mortification of the flesh; his refusal of temporal advantages; his contempt for the world; his brotherly love for all; his zeal for the salvation of souls; his effectual preaching; his reprobation and hatred of wickedness; his withstanding of heretics; his enforcement of the canon law against those that broke the vow of chastity; his conversion to the spiritual life of divers men and women who had formerly lived according to the world; and his loyalty to our lord Urban the Sixth—in all those things I say he gave so good an example, that many thousands of men testify to the belief that is in them that he was not less great in these virtues than he was in the aforesaid sciences. Master William de Salvavilla, Cantor at Paris, Archdeacon of Brabant in the Church of Liège, an eminent doctor in Theology, compiled the above eulogy from that which he heard from the lips of men worthy of credit, and from his own knowledge of Master Gerard, and he believes beyond all doubt that it is true.

THE LIFE OF

(2) (*The novice.*)

“The words of this doctor as to the praise justly due to Master Gerard, the first founder of our Brotherhood, agree with what thou hast written. For that which the doctor hath written as a brief summary, thou hast told at greater length—wherefore the more testimonies I hear of that revered man, the more do I rejoice, and give the greater credence to his sayings.”

(2) (*The elder Brother.*)

“That thou mayest be fashioned to a knowledge of the faithful Master not by the testimony of others only, I will set forth certain of the very words of his mouth. So shalt thou know clearly what he taught and openly declared during his lifetime, when thou dost read his public profession of faith.”

CHAPTER XVIII

Of his public profession of faith, and of his delivering the true Gospel in his preaching

(1)



GERARD, who am called in the vulgar tongue “Groote,” do declare in the presence of God Almighty and all the Saints, and before you and all men, that in regard to those things that are of faith, I have steadfastly preached and defended that faith which is certain, pure, and Catholic, resting upon Jesus Christ Himself Who is the chief corner Stone. Likewise that I have taught and spread abroad like seed, those doctrines and methods that are wholesome for morals, sure, undoubted, evangelical and apostolic, following the Divinely inspired

GERARD THE GREAT

Scriptures and the interpretation and meaning given thereunto by the Saints and Fathers, namely: Ambrose, Gregory, Augustine, Jerome, Chrysostom, Dionysius, Bernard, Bede, Isidore, Hugo and Richard: and the writings of these Fathers, together with those of other Saints, I do hold and use as inspired.

Likewise as to those things which I have written and preached concerning Institutes made by men, the matter of the Decrees and Decretals, and above all concerning wicked and notorious wantons, I do hope that all men who have any intimate knowledge of the law may find that those things which I have laid down are either proved certainly and beyond doubt, or that (applying the same limits and qualifications which are given in my writings and discourses) such men may approve thereof as being somewhat safe, or probable, or likely to be true, subject always to the judgement of the Holy Roman Church, to whom with all humility I everywhere and always submit myself. And if any man—which God forbid—should say or feign that I have spoken aught against that Faith and sound doctrine which I everywhere defend, and should either expressly mention me by name as so doing, or (if he dare not so much) should speak more vaguely to that effect, and indirectly harass me by making use of the prejudices of Clerks or lay folk;—if anyone, I say, shall thus allude to, or openly defame me, his testimony shall be found to be lying and deceitful.

I do receive the doctrine of submission to the Bishop, to whom I pay deference in this respect, but if—which God forbid—any such accusation against me be found in the writings of our lord the Prince-bishop, I do make that answer which the

THE LIFE OF

blessed Bernard made to certain letters of the chief Pontiff which gave assent to an evil report. "Either our Pontiff hath been ensnared by lies, or he hath been overcome of importunity."

(2) *Resolutions and Intentions set forth by Master Gerard in the name of the Lord, but not confirmed by vows.*

I purpose to order my life for the glory, honour, and service of God and the salvation of my soul; to prefer no temporal good either of the body, or of honour, or of fortune, or of knowledge, to my soul's salvation. To strive to excel in every godly endeavour of which I may be assured that I have any knowledge or discernment, having regard to my bodily powers and my state of life; of which endeavours I have mentioned some hereafter.

(3) My first resolution is to desire no further preferment, and in the future not to set my hope upon, nor to long for any temporal gain; for the more I shall have, the more covetous shall I certainly become; and in the second place according to the rule of the Primitive Church, thou canst not hold several benefices. Likewise if thou doest so, it shall repent thee in the hour of thy death; for it is commonly reported that never hath any pluralist died without knowing such remorse. The more benefices and goods I hold, the more masters have I, and the more burdens must I bear; and this is contrary to that freedom of soul which is the greatest good in the Spiritual Life. By the holding of great possessions the affections are bound, and being bound are held thereby; and the desire of such things doth infect the soul, and is repugnant to peace of heart and quietness of mind; moreover the cares which are connected therewith do often defile and perturb the mind.

GERARD THE GREAT

Likewise as the appetite for more possessions must be cut off, so my present possessions must be reduced by little and little to a smaller compass, for if I can give alms of those things which I have, why should I strive after more? If having little I give but little to God, it is as if having much I also gave much, for God weigheth not the amount of the gift, but rather the heart of the giver; wherefore the widow who put in two mites was preferred by Him before the rich. Also I see that the things which I now have do exceedingly bind me, and if those which I should acquire were added thereto, how much more should I be bound? Moreover my present possessions are enough, having regard to our Common Life and my position.

(4) Having achieved this purpose, I resolve that I will not pay court to any Cardinal or Ecclesiastic so as to gain benefices or temporal goods, because such subservience doth lead to many falls and relapses into sin. Thou art weak, and if thou art subservient—except it be to God—thou shalt expose thyself to many dangers. Thou art near enough to death as it is, and thou art not so strong as to bear any revellings.

In like manner thou shalt not serve any temporal master for the sake of gain; nor shalt thou be willing to practice astrology at the bidding of any; nor oughtest thou to let any man in the world persuade thee to have dealings with any forbidden science since these are in themselves evil in many ways, they cause distrust and suspicion, and they are forbidden. Also it is thy duty, so far as it is possible, to drive away these superstitions and all other curious arts from the minds of men, preserving a quiet mind, purity, and liberty of will. So doing I shall please God, by following His good

THE LIFE OF

pleasure in these very matters in which I formerly displeased Him. Thou shalt never observe the seasons that are held to be propitious for journeying, or for blood letting or for any other thing save in the material sense of considering the density of the atmosphere, for such curious choice is forbidden in the decrees and by the Holy Fathers.

Likewise whatever I shall begin, I will begin it in the name of the Lord, and in the matter I will put my hope in the Lord that He will direct me therein to the way of my salvation; put not any trust in the divining of fate, or in reading the stars, but hope only in God, and in prayer; in good angels and their protection. How do I know whether in my journey, or mine undertaking success shall be profitable to me? Truly such success is very often unprofitable, and difficulties and tribulation are oftentimes most profitable; therefore I will submit me to the ordinance of God. "Blessed is the man whose hope is in God"; "Cast therefore all thy care upon Him, for He careth for thee!" How great is the mercy which hath recalled me (as I hope) to Him, by means of chastisements which I bore unwillingly! Since we should not be anxious as to what we shall eat, how much less should we be so about the forecasts of the stars and other superstitions? It is needful for every Christian to abandon himself in purity of heart and to commit himself to God.

(5) Also I will never try to anticipate the future, and for the most part will think but little upon it, for I will devote to God both myself and everything that doth concern me. Man is defiled by honours, by favours, and by greed, after which all men do seek; and by such knowledge, whose object is gain, his mind is darkened, his passions are

GERARD THE GREAT

aroused, the straightness of his nature is made crooked and his desires are tainted, so that he cannot rightly discern what things are of God, and virtuous, and good for the body. Wherefore it is very seldom that a man who doth follow after knowledge which bringeth him wealth (as the study of medicine, or of laws or statutes), is right-minded or just in his reasoning, or righteous, or doth live the more contentedly or uprightly.

Do not spend thy time in the study of geometry, arithmetic, rhetoric, dialectic, grammar, songs, poetry, legal matters or astrology; for all these things are reprov'd by Seneca, and a good man should withdraw his mind's eye therefrom and despise them: How much more, therefore, should they be eschewed by a spiritually-minded man and a Christian? Moreover such studies are an unprofitable expense of time, and are of no help for good living.

Of all the sciences of the heathen, their Moral Philosophy is least to be avoided—for this is often of great use and profit both for one's own study and for teaching others. Wherefore the wiser amongst them, such as Socrates and Plato, turned all Philosophy into the consideration of moral questions, and if they spoke of deep matters they dealt therewith as in a figure and lightly, dwelling upon their moral aspect (as thou knowest from the blessed Augustine and thine own study) so that some rule for conduct might always be found side by side with knowledge.

Seneca, too, following this principle, as often mingles moral dissertations with his discussion of natural philosophy; for whatsoever doth not make us better, or induce us to avoid evil, is harmful.

THE LIFE OF

The secrets of nature should not be sought out in the writings of the heathen, or in the books of our Law, the Old and New Testaments, but when they meet us therein God is to be praised and glorified for them and in them; so that the knowledge of natural laws may be of profit and be offered as a sacrifice to God Most High by giving thank-offerings to Him like righteous Abel, and that like him we may draw holy thoughts therefrom to the honour of God. But in everything remember that all these things defile the mind and do not satisfy it; and through the grace of the Most High, thou shalt find, as I hope, that thou canst not stomach them.

(6) I resolve never to take a degree in medicine, because I do not purpose to get any gain or preferment by such a degree; and the same resolve doth hold for Civil and canon law; for the purpose of a degree is either gain or preferment, or vain glorification and worldly honour, which latter things if they lead not to the former, are simply useless, empty, and most foolish, being contrary to godliness and all freedom and purity. When a man doth crave for them he falleth into many evils, and they are worse than the motives of gain and preferment. I resolve not to study any art, nor to write any book, nor to undertake any journey nor any labour, nor to pursue any science, with the purpose of extending mine own fame and repute for knowledge, or of gaining honour, or the gratitude of any man or for the sake of leaving a memorial of myself behind me. For if I should do these things, or any act whatsoever with such motives and take my reward therein, I should not be rewarded of my Father Which is in Heaven. If I shall do any of these I will do it always for

GERARD THE GREAT

some good purpose, looking for a reward which is eternal: wherefore let the extending of my repute be in every way avoided. This desire for empty glory, for remembrance, and for fame is so admirably reprov'd, even by the Philosophers, that any man who is worthy of praise would scarce harbour such a motive. But if praise should follow any deed done really for the sake of God (but the motive of which was unseen, though the deed itself was in the light), give then that praise and glory to the Most High.

(7) Likewise after the example of Bernard, utter no word by the which thou mayest seem to be very religious, or endowed with knowledge. Resolve to avoid and abhor all public disputations which are but wranglings for success in argument, or the appearance thereof (such as the disputations of graduates in Theology and Arts at Paris), and take no part therein. These are unprofitable, always concerned with mere subtleties, and for the most part superstitious, sensual, devilish or earthly, so that the teaching thereof is often hurtful, ever unprofitable, and a useless waste of time; —meanwhile thou canst gain spiritual profit by prayer, or meditation, or the study of some holy book.

So also I will never argue with anyone in private unless it is certain and evident that some good end shall follow, or unless my fellow disputant doth desire to hear me, or is one with whom I can confer without wrangling, and temperately which conditions are to be observed except when malice doth demand severity for some eventual good: but even so I will never act without due deliberation. It is evident that to attain a good end, everything must ever be ordered for the Glory of God; that

THE LIFE OF

is, that one must pray continually: wherefore talk not with anyone unless he doth admit the truth.

(8) Thou shalt never study to take a degree in Theology, nor strive therefor, because: (1.) I care not to follow after gain or preferment or reputation, and knowledge I may have equally well without a degree. (2.) The common life of an university is carnal and is for them that savour carnal things. (3) In many respects thou mayest be hindered from promoting the spiritual health of thy neighbour, from prayer, from purity of mind and from contemplation. (4) One must be present at many vain lectures and be in the company of a multitude of men, by which things a man is defiled and turned from his path.

Thou shalt never busy thyself with law or medicine save when occasion ariseth and when thou canst do some good thereby, for: (1) These studies have no nourishment in them, but do turn aside the mind; yet for the sake of peacemaking, or in case of necessity, or when some urgent cause ariseth one may meddle with law; and with medicine also for the sake of one's own bodily health or that of a fellow man. (2) These be worldly matters in which it is convenient rather to take the counsel of others, than to give advice. (3) The study of medicine is forbidden to Divines, Monks, and them that do long after the Law of God.

Thou shalt not give medicine of doubtful virtue, nor prescribe any medicine whatever for a disease the nature whereof is uncertain, nor give a potion to any sick man save under most urgent necessity when no other adviser may be had; otherwise thou shalt never intrude thyself: thou seest how greatly good men do rejoyce in being freed from practising this art.

GERARD THE GREAT

Thou shalt not advise upon, nor busy thyself with causes concerning matters of opinion or controversy unless: (1) It be clearly apparent to thee that otherwise some falsehood might be propagated; or (2) for Charity's sake; or (3) the whole cause be that of righteousness; or (4) it be most certainly for the curbing of evil manners; or (5) to prevent the oppression of the poor; or (6) unless thou canst intervene and yet preserve an equal mind. After such interference withdraw thyself so that there remain to thee no care for the residue of the matter. Likewise take good heed that thou be careful not to be moved by friendship, or kinship, or hatred, and if thy friend or kinsman, or one that was aforetime thine enemy be concerned, search thy heart to know if thou wouldest act in the same manner if he were a stranger or not thine enemy. It is evident, as Virgil saith, that the happiness of the dweller in the country is that "he hath not looked upon the iron rigour of the law and the mad turmoil of the Forum."

Thou shalt not appear before a spiritual officer or judge, as a favour to any friend or kinsman or other man, nor at all unless the most urgent call of duty require it. If such case of necessity urge thee, thou oughtest to send a deputy, and not to go thyself, because by this is quietness of mind disturbed if thou dost intrude thyself into the affairs, the tumult and tempest of the world. In all other conditions let the dead bury their dead. Thou shalt not appear before the civil magistrates or the secular judge in Deventer save in the case of similar necessity, for thy friends deal well enough with all such matters before magistrates.

Never busy thyself with any controversies of

THE LIFE OF

men whatsoever (save as above) unless it be to compose them, and when this can be done in a short time and without brawling. Even when such composition ought to be made, if it can be done as well by another, do not intrude thyself; always consider this. Yet put not aside the making of peace when thou canst truly make it, out of deference to thine own quietness.

(10) Whensoever any kinsman of thine is beaten, or slain, or evilly entreated, thou shalt never evilly entreat him that did the injury; nor ever give counsel against him to his hurt; nor ever close thy mouth against him, nor avoid him. Rather admonish him with words of comfort, or lead him back to peace. Also if his friends would take vengeance thou shalt dissuade them therefrom with words of peace, and from injury that they do it not.

Do thou forgive all men, and be an ensample in so doing, and so much the more as thou dost admonish others. I will never have part in the doings of my friends or kinsmen or betters, save only such as are acts of piety, tending to mercy and duty and justice, and also such as may not be done so well through another man. Yet would it be evil to turn aside, for the sake of preserving mine own quietness, from works of piety and justice which could not be done through another, and from my duty in serving my neighbour.

Of the study of Holy Books

(11) I now return to consider the pursuit of knowledge. Let the root of thy study and the mirror of thy life be these: First, the Gospel of Christ, for therein is the Life of Christ. (2) The lives and discourses of the Fathers. (3) The

GERARD THE GREAT

Epistles of Paul and the other Canonical Epistles, and the Acts of the Apostles. (4) Holy Books, as the meditations of Bernard and the Horologium of Anselm, Bernard on the Conscience, the Soliloquies of Augustine, and suchlike books. (5) The legends and devotions of the Saints, the Instructions of the Fathers on Conduct, such as the Pastoral of Gregory, the blessed Augustine on Monastic work, Gregory on Job, and so forth. (6) The Homilies of the Holy Fathers and of the Four Doctors upon the Gospels, the Interpretations of the Holy Fathers and Commentaries upon the Epistles of Paul, for these are included in the authorized readings of the Church. (7) The study of the Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus, for these are included in the lectionaries and authorized readings of the Church. "I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding also." (8) The study and interpretation of the Psalter, for this is included in the services of the Church of the Holy Fathers. "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also." (9) The study of the Books of Moses; the historical books—Joshua, Judges and Kings; of the Prophets and the expositions of the Fathers upon the same.

(12) As to the manner of perusing the Decrees, so as to know what was determined of our forefathers and of the Church: one must not strive to master them, but only peruse them; (1) lest through ignorance of the law thou pervert piety into disobedience. (2) That thou mayest see the material fruit of the Primitive Church. (3) That thou mayest know from what thou thyself shouldst refrain, and from what thou shouldst admonish others to refrain.

THE LIFE OF

(13) Thou oughtest to hear Mass to the end, every day that thou canst, for thus it is ordained even for lay folk on Sundays in the directions for the Mass (*de consec. I. C.*) and for Clerks that they hear It daily, as is said in the note in the same place. Also remain in the Church on feast days until the solemnization of the Mass is completed. Singing is a help to devotion for the natural body as thou knowest by experience. One should always rise for the reading of the Gospel, and stand up, wherefore it is said in the directions (*de consec. I. C.*): “By our Apostolic authority we command that men sit not, but stand, reverently bending at the reading of the Gospel.” In the word *reverently* is implied the honour due to the Gospel, as also in the place wherein it is said: “Let them hear the words thereof with attention and adore with faith,” that is, “Let them show reverence by the posture of the body”; this doth consist—first in the bending, secondly in the lowering of the hood as is customary, thirdly in bowing at the Names of Jesus and Mary; for those devoted to God have this custom.

Likewise, when the Gospel is read, the mind should not occupy itself with any other devotion, or reading which doth demand attention; for the senses, when occupied upon several matters, are less intent upon any single one. The words of the Gospel and of the Apostolic writings are ordained to be heard at the Celebrations, as is said in the directions (*de consec. I. D.*): “It is vain to hear if we attend not.”

Moreover, one should read nothing nor meditate upon aught else, for the duty of the moment is to attend duly to the Gospel, and we do take away therefrom any attention which we may expend

GERARD THE GREAT

upon other prayers and meditations. Our bowing ourselves at these words and the bodily posture of reverence are symbols of the reverence of our minds, and these be false symbols if so be that the things signified answer not thereto. Moreover, the outward observance is a means to induce inward reverence, but it is vain if the one answer not to the other.

(14) Furthermore, to be reverent with the lips and the understanding also is a greater thing than to show reverence with the lips only, or by the lowering of the hood; wherefore I will lower my hood to hear, I will hear with the ear, and I will hear with the understanding also. Otherwise the words are as a tinkling cymbal or as sounding brass. No words or sayings are mine own if the meaning thereof doth not reach my mind—also thou shalt stand with bended knee, with head uncovered and with bowed back after the Consecration of the Sacred Host, if thou art able to see It, or the Chalice. This humble adoration and abasement of body is seemly before God, and doth in every way betoken an attitude of mind which is fitting as a help to devotion; yea, and most fitting is the bending of the head over the arm as thou dost know: for the servant is by all means bound to show reverence in the presence of his Lord. A bended posture doth admirably befit devotion of mind, for the motions of the spirit do bear relation to the posture of the body. When thou art afar off or canst not see, prostrate thyself and bow thine head and pray to thy God in secret from the Sanctus to the Pax, and afterward, whether thou dost partake or not, until the Gospel of St. John.

(15) Receive the Pax with reverence and devotion, for it is a contact with the Body of the Lord

THE LIFE OF

through the mouth of the priest. Is not reverence paid to The Veronica, and to the picture of Christ, though it is not sanctified by His bodily presence? In the Primitive Church all the faithful were wont to communicate, and in place of such Communion the Pax is given as being in some measure a receiving of Christ's Body. The reason (as I hold) that His Body is not now given so generally is that in the Primitive Church when His Blood was but lately shed, men were better, and religious fervour was in full vigour and at its height: but this is now grown old, wherefore He hath withdrawn Himself.

When the Pax doth come be thou prepared as if thou didst verily receive the Body of Christ, and at that time lift up the love of thine heart and prepare thyself so that though thou are not able carnally to receive the Elements of the Holy Sacrament, thou mayest at least do so in the Spirit. After receiving such communion through the Pax, the love of thine heart must abide and endure inwardly; but if thou dost begin to wander in mind, as doth often happen to thee when thou dost meditate without ordering thy thoughts beforehand, turn thy mind to Christ's Passion.

(16) Likewise from the Sanctus onward prepare to look upon the Host—are not all men wont to make preparation before looking upon their King, by whom also they must be seen? After this make thyself ready for the Reception and do nought besides, for at that time the Presence of Christ doth work upon thee and doth help thy weakness; thus shalt thou be moved to love the Sacrament. This is evident from the words wherein it is said, "Lift up your hearts" and "We have lifted them up to the Lord."

GERARD THE GREAT

Also always draw so near the Priest as thy condition doth permit, to hear the Mass and to look upon the Host, and stand in the Presence Thereof. Be not willing to consult for any man that he may be ordained, nor to speak for him, nor assist him to this end unless he be most devout. The first of these resolutions is on account of the responses pertaining to the office which ought to be made, and are not made, as is shown in the fourth of the Sentences and in the Decrees; the second is, on account of the risk of Simony which doth often occur; and also, by reason of the unprofitable state of the Church.

With regard to abstinence these things seem good, but are not the subject of promise. First to keep the fasts that are ordained; secondly, never to eat flesh meats. The reasons hereof are to be found in the Chapter of the Decrees which is called *Margarita* (*de consec.*, § v). Thirdly, save for just cause, not to omit to fast during Advent and Septuagesima. Fourthly, let there be a daily fast which doth consist in not wholly satisfying the appetite unless cold weather doth hinder this resolve. All philosophers do advise this, specially Seneca and Aristotle. Withhold thy hand while appetite doth yet remain: the moment of its satisfaction is hard to know, yet do thou thus reflect upon it by considering how much thou wouldst wish to eat if it were right for thee to consult thy desire, and while this doth still endure, deny some part thereof as shall seem reasonable to thee.

Fifthly, toward the close of a meal, or before partaking of the last dish, consider how much thou hast consumed, and how much more thou wouldst eat if thou didst continue, and in future omit somewhat of the earlier or latter part of the meal.

THE LIFE OF

Sixthly, at the beginning when thou dost set forth to prepare thy food think upon the victual and how much thou dost require. Seventhly, take but one cooked pear after thy meal, and that not of inordinate size, or three of the very smallest. Eighthly, always eat in the evening between the fourth and fifth hours, unless the presence of guests, or infirmity, or some accident, such as a journey, compel thee. This is approved for the following reasons: (1) This hour is convenient for digestion and for the hindering of that corruption of food in the stomach which would take place in waking hours through lack of warmth; (2) during waking hours study and other matters such as care or sadness do impede digestion; (3) take food at this time lest drink following food may hinder digestion; (4) it doth prevent drink so taken from causing disturbance as otherwise doth often happen; (5) lest raw fruit, vegetables, and the like might do hurt as they would if taken in the daytime; (6) thy sleep will be the better, for a full belly doth slumber readily; (7) at that time study and prayer which are the portion of the daytime do less hinder sleep; (8) by this custom thou wilt get thee to bed quickly, and always at the same hour; (9) by so doing one may get continuous sleep through going to rest in good time; (10) the love of study will not tempt thee too much at night; (11) by this means thou hast the day unbroken for work and prayer. (12) Thus, all thy waking hours are spent in abstinence and fasting, are unhindered and fit for the service of God and for work. Also a man hath more desire for food when he is eating than when he is altogether abstaining, so that one cannot so readily practise abstinence when near to or at the table. From the

GERARD THE GREAT

Exaltation of the Holy Cross till Easter take but one daily meal; this is the custom of the Carthusians and Bernardines and others: this Season doth begin in September about the Equinox, and doth continue until near about the Vernal Equinox.

(17) In seasons of great cold it is lawful to take more food, but yet not exceeding one meal daily; —such is the teaching of Hippocrates; this doth help thee to resist the cold, which thou couldst scarce do otherwise; for the same reason thou mayest sleep longer by one hour or an hour and a half. When it is needful to eat twice in the day take a small amount, and food of light quality, such as one egg and no more, or rather some drying food as bread and wine, or vegetables, with a little bread, but if thou take wine let it be for thy stomach's sake. The reasons of this are as above, where I have argued of the need to eat at night.

I would wish to be able never to drink wine unnecessarily so long as I am in good health, lest I violate the precepts of Paul; for to do so is luxury and is over costly. One should never drink immediately before or after a meal, nor during the course thereof unless infirmity or some most urgent cause compel. During and after manual work one should by no means drink anything unless the body is cool: this is healthy for body and soul. Let nothing lead thee to drink between times, or so as to break a fast: it is good to bind thy feet in the fetters of wisdom. Set a time wherein to read what thou dost write in this book for it doth order thy life. It doth seem to me that the fathers in the desert offered short and frequent prayers, so that the heart might be raised continually to the Lord, and might not be set on

THE LIFE OF

worldly affairs, but be abstracted therefrom, and thus should one do.

(18) I do purpose in the Name of the Lord always to fast upon the fourth day of the week unless infirmity, or reasonable cause hinder me. Yet this I ordain not as an unalterable rule, but as somewhat whereat to strive; and so also on the Sabbath, and on the sixth day—for upon the fourth Judas betrayed the Lord, and on the sixth was He crucified. He who fasteth not on these days doth needlessly betray Him and taketh part with His murderers. I am the more bound to observe these days in that by the apportionment of God it is my lot to be a Clerk, moreover by such fast my health is preserved and I do feel that thereby my soul is better with her God. But even if such abstinence should seem to hurt the body in some small measure, think not of that, for thou hast always been in better health when thou didst fast. Ever pay some tribute to thy God, and thou wilt ever remember Him the better.

(19) Avoid haste, eagerness, and gluttony in eating, for such greed proceedeth from inordinate love of its object. A greedy mouth and lust for meat have an intermixture of sin. Gregory in his Exposition of Job saith: "This doth stir up loquacity, leadeth to excess, doth heat the mind and turn it from the path just as drunkenness or too much talk do kindle it and lead it into snares."

This doth also cut off and shut out all thought of God.

It is better to do one action well with great deliberation, than through lack thereof to be thrown out of one's course. Also, as concerneth bodily health, in proportion as food is taken well and with deliberation, so much the more readily and whole-

GERARD THE GREAT

somely is it digested. The same habit of deliberation should prevail in writing and speaking and in action also, because it is impossible to seek therein the Glory of God, if a man so impetuously rush into a matter that his whole strength is occupied in it. Learn then to be slow and restrained in action.

Do not do any good thing in such a way as to run into disobedience. In matters of temporal wealth, repayments, and expenditure upon books, regard thyself as a steward, and look to it that thou be found faithful. Therefore be frugal in supplying to thyself food and raiment, that thou mayest the better supply the needy, and worthier men than thou, and mayest promote the salvation of souls. Never give aught that is of any worth to one that is not needy, for thou wilt find very many that are in want, and if thou dost give to them that have abundance, thou art not a faithful steward, nor prudent to thine own salvation. In thy giving take no thought of carnal things. I will not receive temporal gifts from any man so long as needier persons than I may be found, for what I would not do myself, that will I not ask of another.

(20) Likewise, Gerard said, a man ought not to be disturbed about any affair of this world. He who doeth that which he knoweth, doth deserve to know much. He who doeth not that which he knoweth doth deserve to be in darkness.

It is a great matter to obey in those things which are contrary to our natural man, and are burdensome—this is true obedience.

Before all things and in all things study specially to be humble inwardly, and also outwardly before the brethren.

THE LIFE OF

The knowledge of all knowledge is for a man to know that he knoweth nothing.

The more a man is assured that he is far from perfection, the nearer is he thereto.

The beginning of vainglory is to be pleasing to oneself.

By this is a man known better than by aught else, that he is praised.

Thou oughtest always to strive to note some good in another, and to think thereof.

Inordinate desire for anything not pertaining to God is as the sin of fornication: therefore the prophet saith: "It is good for me to cleave to God."

We ought to be strenuous in prayer, and not lightly to desist from it nor think that God is unwilling to hear us.—Though oftentimes repelled, we should not despair.

He who is faint-hearted should pray as a son to a good father, as is said in the Gospel: "Which of you if he ask his father bread, will he give him a stone," and so forth.

In everything in the whole world there is temptation, though a man perceive it not.

(21) The greatest of temptations is not to feel temptation; so long as a man knoweth that there is somewhat in him to be pruned away, so long doth he stand well.

When any evil is suggested to thee, think what thou wouldest ask thy fellows to do in like case, then doth the Devil stand confused.

Always dwell more upon the hope of Eternal Glory than upon fear of Hell.

Let every man beware of causing scandal to others by his conduct; let him study to amend the same, and everywhere to behave himself honestly, that others may be the more edified.

GERARD THE GREAT

With whatsoever thoughts a man doth fall asleep, with such doth he awaken; at these times it is well to pray or to read some psalms.

Slight shame borne here doth do away unending shame before God and all the Saints.

Study only to please Him Who doth know thee and all that pertaineth to thee: suppose that thou dost please all men but dost displease God; what should it profit thee? therefore turn away thy heart from the creature, yea, even with great violence.

Think how thou mayest be altogether conqueror of thyself and lift up thy heart ever to God, as saith the prophet: "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord."


Thanks be to God.



APPENDIX TO THE LIFE OF GERARD
GROOTE

*A Letter to the Bishop of Utrecht on behalf of
Master Gerard Groote when he was forbidden
to preach publickly.*

Most Potent Father, and Prince of the people
of Utrecht,

T hath happened lately that Gerard Groote, a deacon of your Diocese, inspired by the Lord, and kindled with zeal to preach the Word even in these latter days, hath denounced before clerks and lay-folk their wickedness, and maintained wholesome, true, Evangelical and Apostolic doctrine as against heretics, usurers, and clerks that live in concubinage. Acting with your license and that of the Parochial Clergy he hath preached also against various crimes and corruptions of divers men in your diocese, not without some fruit, and hath sown the seed not without increase (as he doth hope). For by his preaching the hearts of many have been turned to the Lord, leaving their former perverse and evil courses.

Through his labours there are many virgins set as flowers in the field of the Lord; lives of chaste widowhood and voluntary poverty, as an harvest therein; renunciations of the world, acts of restitution and many other fruits sprung from the seed of Ecclesiastical and Catholic doctrine;

THE LIFE OF GERARD THE GREAT

and these things are seen and known of them that do truly love God.

By his means also the boldness of certain heretics who creep in secret places on the earth hath been kept down, and the wickedness of usury and disordered lust have ceased from the land of Zeeland. But yet these clerks and priests that live in concubinage have procured (as we suppose) by means of a letter obtained from you that this Gerard should be restrained indirectly from exercising the office of a preacher, and this either without cause, or without any that he knoweth.

For although your letter did apply to all priests, yet almost all save Gerard have been restored to their offices; and this, as he thinks, doth arise not from the deliberate intention of the bishop, but through the suggestions of malicious men causing no small loss and detriment to the cause of Holy edification. At this do heretics rejoice and creep about more boldly; for this cause are those enemies of the Church glad, namely the Clerks who live in concubinage, continuing to live most uncleanly in the lusts of the flesh: usurers are well pleased, and scandals are increased, yea, even more perchance than carnal and worldly minds can comprehend. Although this Gerard calleth God to witness that so far as he himself is concerned he would wish to be at leisure to explore the truth, and to be quiet, yet he perceives that the enemy of mankind is everywhere striving against men and is driving them over the precipices and into the abyss of sin; and he hath hope that some of these may by his preaching be delivered from the snare of the hunter and from the noisome pestilence, which hope the effects of his former preaching do justify; therefore he is stirred

THE LIFE OF

by zeal for the House of the Lord, inflamed and urged by love for his neighbour to preach and sow the seed of the Word of God (if it may be) without temporal reward, in poverty and with humility but in all truth, as formerly he preached and sowed the same not without visible fruit. If a special license is refused him he doth ask that at least the parochial clergy may not be forbidden to employ him if they will; for according to the custom of the State and diocese of Utrecht they have been wont always to employ any trusty and good preachers whom they would, without such license. Furthermore if in spite of the good fruit his preaching hath borne, and the aforesaid custom, you should wish to inhibit Gerard from preaching (which thing God forbid should happen in your dominions), he doth ask and humbly and urgently desire of you: (1) to declare to him the pretext and reason of such inhibition; (2) not to judge him, deprive him of his right, nor suspend him from the exercise thereof without such admonitions as ought always to precede judgement; for he is ready to argue each several doctrine that he doth teach in public and private, not only before you, Father, but also before any man, and truly to prove the same from the sacred writings of the Saints and from the Scriptures: and if it be necessary to lay them before the Supreme Pontiff.

A Letter of Master William de Salvarvilla, a Cantor at Paris, to Pope Urban VI, asking that a license to preach be granted to Master Gerard.

To our most Holy Father in Christ, our Lord Urban VI., by Divine Providence Pope, Supreme

GERARD THE GREAT

Pontiff of the Inviolable Church of Rome, and of the whole world, these from your Holiness' most humble petitioner and servant William de Salvarilla, Chanter of Paris and Archdeacon of Brabant in the Church of Liège.

MOST HOLY FATHER,

In all subjection and most humbly and devoutly kissing the feet of your Holiness, I do write that which followeth in singleness of heart, being zealous (as I believe) for the service of God.

There is a certain reverend man Gerard Grootte, a Deacon of the diocese of Utrecht, learned in the sciences both liberal, natural and moral, and also in Theology and Canon Law. He hath long ago given over all his benefices for God's sake, namely prebends at Utrecht and Aix, and also his patrimony, which was no small one, having retained but a small part of the same to provide him a slender sustenance. To him is the world crucified, and he to the world; he hath become a mighty adversary to heretics, a zealous upholder of the unity of the Church, and a fervent preacher in the said diocese as against the sins of lay folk and clerks; yet he hath not received or asked for any recompense for his preaching, nor doth he seek any temporal or Ecclesiastical Benefice, but he doth desire to have a further Commission under the authority of the Apostolic See to the end that he may be able to preach more freely and without hindrance. Wherefore it would seem expedient, as I judge, that your Holiness should give him authority to preach and to make inquisition against heretics; and likewise to publish the Canonical decree of your Holiness granting such authority

THE LIFE OF GERARD THE GREAT

in the Province of Cologne or at least in the aforesaid diocese of Utrecht.

May the Most High see fit to preserve your Holiness in prosperity, to be the ruler of His Church.

Given at Leyden on the 21st day of October.

The following epitaph on Gerard is appended to A Kempis' Life of the Master as edited by Somalius. It is uncertain whether A Kempis was the author of the lines, but from the title "Epitaphium vetus et inconditum" it would seem probable that they are by a different hand. As it is impossible to reproduce the rhyme and metre of the original in a translation, the Latin text of the Epitaph is here given:

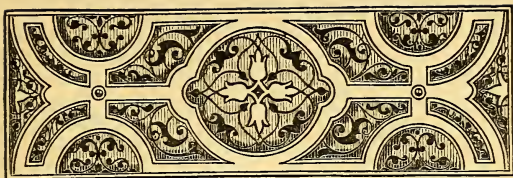
EPITAPHIUM VETUS ET INCONDITUM VENERABILIS MAGISTRI GERARDI MAGNI

Gerardus Magnus vixit sicut pius agnus,
Fecit quod dixit, sicut docuit quoque vixit.
Sicut non fictus aliis mitis sibi strictus
Lux fuerat Cleri, tradens huic lumina veri,
Lux fuerat pravis, oculus mentis bene navis.
Hic Mundo spretus, sed pneumate corde repletus
Ejus doctrina, falsis fuerat quasi spina
Ridiculum vanis, odium mentis male sanis
Quæ falsos læsit, pars veridicis sed adhæsit
Illi pro vero, fuit utilis hic quia clero
Ut clero laicis, prodesse volens inimicis,
Doctrina veri, debet Christus misereri
Ejus de jure, pro tali pondere curæ.
Talis namque fore, voluit gratis sed amore
Divino tactus, nulla mercede coactus
Namque resignavit præbendas sicut amavit
Christum, sic stravit carnem tenues quoque pavit,
De propriisque bonis tenuit regimen rationis.
Sic fuit exemplo lux in Christi bene templo.
Gerardus Magnus, quem verus diligit Agnus,
Sanctorum sortem tenet evincens modo mortem.



THE LIFE OF THE REVERED FLORENTIUS,
A DEVOUT PRIEST, AND VICAR
OF THE CHURCH OF
DEVENTER





THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

PREFACE

(1)



FOLLOWING the order laid down, I do now think good to write certain things concerning the life and character of Florentius, that Reverend Father of pious memory, Priest of the Church of Deventer, and once a disciple of that Master Gerard of whom I have told above. This order in my history is fitting, that having first shown the fertility of the good tree in Gerard, the founder of our Devotion, I should next exhibit the sweetness of the fair flower thereof in the godly Florentius, his disciple, for he was eminent as a follower of the same Devotion and a most fervent promoter of it.

His humble and obedient character was indeed an herb of healing for the drooping soul, and his saintly virtues are an instruction to young and old alike.

(2) I beseech thee, good brother, that thou interpret not the artlessness of my words to the injury of this illustrious priest, for he was himself a lover of humility and artlessness; but do thou

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

read and mark the good things that I shall tell of him with the eyes of pious deference. Do as doth the provident bee drawing sweet honey from fair flowers in some green meadow, and (for the edification of thy condition and order) sow the seeds of those virtues which adorned our beloved Father Florentius, and plant his example in the garden of thy soul, to bear as it were flowers of roses, and sweet-scented lilies therein. So shalt thou go forward continually in virtue, and thine heart shall glow yet more fervently in the furnace of the love of Christ. He was a mirror of virtue notable indeed, and to all that desire to serve God, one that doth help them to reach the Kingdom of Heaven. Since I had intimate knowledge of him, and did oft stand by and minister to him, I am so much the more competent to speak truly concerning his life.

Novice

(3) I pray thee complete to the honour of God that work which thou didst undertake at my desire and that of others; for it will be a joy to them that come after to hear how bright were the stars which did shine forth in our land. And thou, too, mayest be a partaker in their merits, if in brotherly love thou art willing to impart to others that knowledge which thou hast freely received.

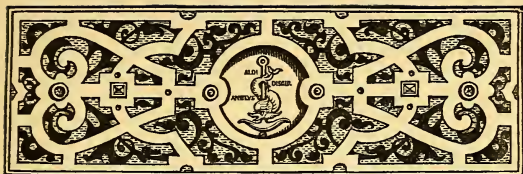
The Elder Brother.

(4) The task which I approach is toilsome and one that is too heavy for my knowledge and my feeble powers. I would choose rather to be silent and read the words of others, than to cast a shadow upon the bright fame of that illustrious man by telling thereof in my homely and barbarous speech.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

But since thou dost not inquire into niceties of style but rather moral worth in the subject, therefore in despite of mine unskill in words thou must not despise my pearls though the shells wherein they are found be worthless.

I confess that I am not so skilful as to be able to set forth the life of so great a father; yet I do offer in the temple of God goat skins to cover the roof of the tabernacle, for I have no precious stones wherewith to adorn the vestment of the priest. Also it would seem to me a hard-hearted and ungrateful thing if I should keep silence as to the virtues of a father so beloved though I am unworthy to tell of them, for in his life he was a benefactor to me and to many others: he first launched me for the service of God, and in the fulness of time steered me to the haven of the monastery. Wherefore in gratitude and for a sweet remembrance of him I in turn do gladly repay his bounty, now he is gone, by the finishing of this poor work. Let it be as some excuse for the task that I have taken on me, that I deeply love this reverend Father, and hope that his memory may always and everywhere flourish among devout men: And may the Lord Jesus who despised not the poor widow's two mites, reward me, his poor servant, in the time to come, for that with a good intention I do put this labour of my hands into His treasury, leaving higher themes to men more learned. Knowing mine own littleness I submit to the correction of my betters, and I ask that every devout mind may help me with prayer, and that if any shall draw any edification from reading these writings, he may praise God for all His gifts and be grateful even for the least.



CHAPTER I

Of the humility of Christ which Florentius studied to imitate

(1)



OUR Lord and Master Jesus Christ, the Flower of all virtue and of all knowledge, began in humility and meekness that rule of life which He handed down to His disciples to be observed as their law and pattern, saying: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest for your souls."

(2) That devout and humble priest of Christ, Master Florentius, the son of Radewin, followed after this virtue of true humility, which is the straightest path to the attainment of the Kingdom of Heaven. This path he kept to the very end of his life through many a spiritual contest, living most strictly in the continual mortification of the flesh, until he entered into the rest of everlasting bliss, to be rewarded by God for his dutiful and pious labours. But how he reached this path of humility I will tell, God helping me, in the following stages of my story. The Almighty and Merciful God, Who from all eternity had chosen him to

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

be consecrated as His priest, and foreordained that he should be illuminated with the more excellent gifts; God, I say, of His marvellous goodness snatched him forth from the shipwreck of the world, and withdrew him therefrom; by the word of Truth He did effectually regenerate him, to lead an holier life and to be a branch yielding new fruit.

CHAPTER II

Of the interpretation of the name Florentius and its three glorious meanings

(1)



ERILY the name "Florentius, son of Radewin," was a prophecy of his future righteousness, which should declare the glory of our Father in Heaven and make yet more bright the fame of his own kin. For herein is a laudable thing, if the life of a man be in accord with his name, and if his repute be consonant with his virtues: which thing is approved in every way by his upright deeds.

Florentius is a name sweet for the righteous to utter and recall, for in his life he showed himself such that he was held in the greatest love and reverence by all men, both the Religious and those of the world.

(2) Well is he named Florentius, as one that gathereth flowers (*Flores legens*) by reason of the liberal arts which once he learned and in which he was so skilled and proficient that he had the title of a Master thereof, as indeed he was—or again by reason of his knowledge of the divine law, and the books of sacred Theology, which he

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

studied (*legit*) yet more gladly in preference to any other Science, and loved more dearly than all the treasures of the world, as saith the prophet in the Psalm, "Therefore have I loved Thy commandments above gold and topaz."

But a far more lovely meaning is "One that holdeth flowers" (*Flores tenens*) because he followed Christ the Flower of all virtues and the Lover of Chastity, for Whose love Florentius despised the flowers of the world and held most firmly the integrity of the faith and the one law of Catholic peace, saying with the Bride in the Song of Songs, "My Beloved to me and I to him, who feedeth among the lilies. I held him and I will not let him go."

(3) Moreover by a more sanctified interpretation and one more fruitful, he is called Florentius as one that gathereth flowers together (*Flores colligens*) because he gathered together with him in his house many clerks and brethren who were in the flower of their age; and these, despising the vanity of the world, served the Most High God with humility and devotion, in chastity of life and brotherly love, as the Holy David singeth with joyful voice: "Behold! how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." These brethren Florentius ruled with such a discipline and taught with such fervency of spirit that his house was a school of heavenly training, having therein a mirror of holiness, a garniture of moral virtues, a pattern of goodness, a door to admit the poor, a place of meeting for clerks, of instruction for lay folk, of refuge for the devout, and for the beginning and carrying forward of every good thing. In this house many honourable and learned men first conceived the spirit of de-

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

votion, and like bees laden with honey went far afield from the full hive to spread fertility in divers places; and God giving them His blessing, the fruit of their labours was not small, so that one may justly say of them that thereby "the flowers have appeared in our land."

CHAPTER III

Of the interpretation of his father's name Radewin

(1)



LET it not seem foolishness if the signification of his father's name be mystically interpreted, for this is thought to tend in no small degree to the honour of so great a man.

Fitting enough, then, is the name of Radewin as meaning "The Divine Radiance," and by this name Christ is rightly signified, for He is the Brightness of the Father Who doth illumine the world with the light of His wisdom, with His spotless life, His true doctrine, His holy miracles, and His abundant revelation. He sent forth also His apostles like beams of the true Sun to preach His word in all the world and give a good example to all the faithful, saying to them: "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father Who is in Heaven."

(2) Therefore is Florentius well named the son of Radewin, for through Christ was he born again to a lively hope, by Him was he worthy to be irradiated and set on fire that he might despise earthly things and fervently love the things of

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

Heaven. And if this name Radewin be translated from the Teutonic into the Latin tongue, "Rade" is "consilium" (that is "counsel"), and "win" is "vinum" (or "wine"), and these two words are excellently fitted to Florentius, who put aside the counsel of worldly wisdom and submitted himself to the commandments of the Law of God according to that saying of the Psalmist: "Thy testimonies are my meditation, and thy Justifications my counsel."

In place of those vain and carnal delights which the world doth afford to them who love it, Christ gave to Florentius a taste of that inner sweetness which the world is not worthy to receive, and filled his heart and soul with the Wine of spiritual joy in the celebration of the Divine Mysteries, so that he glowed inwardly with the flame of the love of God and rejoiced with the voice of exultation saying with that most devout prophet: "My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God." Then, too, concentrating all the powers within him, and being caught up in the Spirit above the body, he offered himself as a lively sacrifice, and one well pleasing unto God, and prayed faithfully with supplication for Holy Church and all Christian people.

In this Sacred Feast he partook of that sweet draught which is poured forth from God Himself, and his soul being melted with love at the thought of God's infinite Bounty, with great giving of thanks he pondered upon these mystical words: "How great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee!"

Having told these things by way of preface, my pen turneth to his deeds.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER IV

Of his native land, and how he went to study at Prague

(1)



HIS revered father and devout priest of Christ, Master Florentius, was Vicar of Deventer, having been converted by the preaching of the venerable Gerard Grootte, the grace of God working therewith. Having been his humble hearer, Florentius studied to imitate Gerard in all things, and receiving his wholesome counsels with gratitude, loved him as his dearest father, the begetter of his salvation, always and everywhere paying him the greatest reverence as was fitting. Therefore he deserved to be loved in turn by Gerard even more than were the other disciples, and to be commended above the rest for the special beauty and modesty of his character, for with these qualities he was eminently endowed and shone therewith in the Religious life.

(2) He was born in the city of Leerdam, in the territory of the noble Count de Erkell; this city is situated near the boundary of Holland and about three miles from Utrecht. His father, Radewin, was well known by repute amongst those of his time; and being sufficiently endowed with goods and substance, considering the needs of his condition in life, he gave his fatherly consent and assistance to his son Florentius when the latter was setting forth to study at Prague. At this time the privileged University of Prague in Bohemia was in a most flourishing state, and many men went more

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

eagerly thither from the Low Countries. He soon became a good scholar, for he was brilliant in understanding and eager to go forward in knowledge, and in like manner he was noted amongst the students for kindness to his intimates and reverence toward his teacher. Afterward he returned to his own country and his kindred, and having gained his Master's Degree was received with honour.

(3) All his friends and neighbours rejoiced together exceedingly; for the pleasure of his presence, his health, and prosperity was rightfully a joy and consolation to them after his absence in lands so distant, and the perils through which God had suffered him to pass. But if his return in due time from the University of Prague, and his studies, gave great delight to his friends, yet since God ordained that something even better should follow, this return was the happy preparation for his eternal well-being, for after the lapse of no great while he became a true disciple of Christ instead of a Master of Arts. During his homeward journey from Prague our good Lord showed him a marvellous thing and one wherein His Mercy was clearly manifest; for when he had reached a deep valley a chariot followed behind him dashing down from the mountain with great speed; and as he could not turn aside from it, and was in fear of bodily peril, he threw himself upon the help of God, for there was no help from man. When he had called upon the Almighty, the immeasurable tenderness of our Saviour was present with him; for wonderful to relate, as soon as he had called upon the Lord, he saw that chariot in front of him upon the road on which he was travelling, and all danger was at an end.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

This whole matter he ascribed to a miracle wrought on his behalf by God Who healeth them that are troubled in heart, and doth free them that call upon Him from every strait.

CHAPTER V

Of his honourable character in the world

(1)



HE was eminent for his honourable character, his cheerfulness amongst his comrades, his kindness in word and generosity in spending. He was comely to look upon, of graceful figure and of moderate height. For a certain time God allowed him to mingle in the world, and learn by experience the deceitful madness thereof, but not to abide the hazard all the days of his life; so that no one whose desire was to be converted might despair of pardon, seeing that a change to better things had been wrought in this Florentius in so short a time.

(2) It happened upon a time that he was invited with many others to a marriage, and when they were upon the way together, being most eager to pleasure his friends and to make merry with them, he did as follows for their gratification: cutting down green branches from the trees he took them and embowered those who sat in the carriage in suchwise as greatly to win their favour. For he knew not yet what the Lord should do concerning him, nor thought with what care he, in company with the devout Virgins, must inwardly adorn his conscience so as to be worthy

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

to be called to an heavenly marriage; nor did he know of that celestial feast at the Marriage of Christ, wherefore he rejoiced to take part in earthly festivities. But through the Mercy of God he abode not long in this vanity, for receiving the blessed call, he attained to that mighty grace of devotion which surpasseth all worldly delight.

(3) But this worldly act of his did foreshadow that good thing which should come to him, namely, that when by the grace of God he was converted into a spiritually minded man he should call many of his fellow guests to that marriage Feast among the citizens of Heaven, which the Immortal Bridegroom Jesus Christ doth celebrate with all the Saints for ever and ever. In after days this was most clearly made manifest by the many brethren whom he turned to the devout life, as I have seen evidently with mine own eyes, and as all Deventer doth know.

CHAPTER VI

*Of his conversion through the preaching of
Master Gerard*

(1)



HE tender care of our Saviour was not lacking to succour this wandering lamb who was straying in great peril amid the mists of worldly fame. Therefore when the time for showing mercy to him was come, the Good Shepherd of Souls carefully withdrew the Sheep which He had dearly bought at the price of His own Blood from the snares that encompassed him, and pitifully led him into the Fold of that Holy Flock over which he should rule.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

When the venerable Master Gerard Groote was preaching the Gospel of Christ throughout the Diocese of Utrecht, many Clerks and lay folk, having heard the Word of God, deserted the vanities of the world, being anxious to avoid the punishment of Eternal fire, and by penitence and sorrow to gain the Kingdom of Heaven; for the voice of the Master as he preached was a living power which did so much the more prevail over the hearts of his hearers in that he himself was before all other men upon the path of virtue. So that his holy life showing itself in deeds gave confirmation to his words.

(2) At that time, therefore, when Gerard was preaching to large congregations in the Church of S. Mary at Deventer, Master Florentius came also, eagerly listening for what he should say; and being outwardly instructed in wisdom through the light of this heavenly discourse, he was pricked to the heart, and soon became enlightened inwardly. For the great preacher was wont to turn his eyes from time to time upon those that stood by, and to frame his discourse with regard to the depth and extent thereof to suit the quality and need of his hearers, gauging these by the zeal which they displayed; just so do eager fishers spread their net most widely where they deem that most fishes have congregated.

So it happened by the inspiration of God that Master Florentius, who was then endowed with all the grace of youth and sufficiently provided with all things necessary, gladly heard the Word of the Lord. He stopped not his ears nor turned aside from the music of that Heavenly Flute, but to his own profit he took to himself those words which proceeded forth from the mouth of the

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

great preacher for the good of all and sundry. Therefore was he numbered amongst those Sheep of whom our Saviour said: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me."

CHAPTER VII

☛ *How he despised the life of the world and joined himself to Master Gerard*

(1)



MASTER FLORENTIUS, therefore, being breathed upon by the Spirit of God and inwardly besprinkled with heavenly dew, suddenly withdrew his idle feet which he had at first planted upon the way of this present world.

He prudently considered that to the short-lived gratification of the flesh there should surely succeed death the ruthless, and grief eternal. He resolved, therefore, to despise the deceitful honours of the world, and to his own exceeding gain thought good to follow the lowly life of Christ, that he might not lose his part in that home-land of the angels which is fair with flowers. Wishing then to converse more intimately with Master Gerard, whom he saw to be zealous toward all men for their soul's health, he delayed not to approach confidently his reverend presence, and to set in order before him his inmost thoughts; for he looked upon Gerard as the friend and steward of God.

(2) When he came Gerard received him gladly, and opening a loving heart to Florentius held converse with him as he desired, being ready to

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

reason with him of any matter concerning which he would inquire.

Coming together they held sweet converse upon the things that pertain to salvation; the heart of each burned with an heavenly flame; the things of earth were of none account, but their good purpose to hold to the service of God was confirmed. For setting an holy life before them, and being zealous to keep citizenship in the country of the Lord, they were made thenceforward of one mind in the love of the Brotherhood. And the manifold grace of Christ was present with them so that they were profitable to salvation not only for themselves but also for their neighbours: for certain learned men and eloquent preachers were added to them, for their comfort and fuller joy and for the adornment of the House of our God. These burning fiercely with that flame which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, chose to walk closely in the footprints of Christ: to despise the world, to wage bold warfare against sin, and so to pass to eternal good.

CHAPTER VIII

How Florentius himself, now fully converted, did convert many others

(1)



AND as that most soft South wind of the Love Divine breathed yet more constantly upon the garden of his heart, and watered it with tears, he began to be very fruitful in devotion, and to be moved with pious zeal to draw others from the defilements of sin. He therefore made it his care that in place

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

of those whose worldly companionship he had formerly loved when occupied with profane study, he should now have Spiritual Brothers; for he desired that others also should be enkindled by that flame by which he himself was set on fire, and illumined by that light by which he was enlightened of God: and he was not backward in directing those who came to him both by words and the light of his example. Therefore he persuaded Clerks and lay folk who desire to serve God to flee from commerce with evil, to hasten to hear the Word of God, to follow after the lowliness of Christ, and to set the life of the Saints as the pattern before their eyes, seeing that through the grace of chastity and the observance of the precepts of the Lord they might gain an everlasting recompense.

(2) Nor was that labour profitless which he expended to gain souls, but an abundant increase grew therefrom, for many young men and maidens, relying on his wholesome counsels, leaving parents and friends, began to walk in the paths of humility and devotion, and hating the life of the world to associate themselves together in Christ after the Apostolic manner; and they rejoiced with eager hearts to keep a Common table, and to have meagre sustenance. Lastly he exhorted them severally to go forward in the steps of virtue, to pray more often; to labour with their hands in due season; to be instant in reading holy books, and in earnest meditation; for by these one shall gain increase of fervour in devotion, and shall have that ever-present dread of the occasions of sin that doth guard a man, that he be not seduced of the devil through the idleness of his heart.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER IX

Of the burdens that he bore, and the wrongs that he suffered

(1)



HAT old enemy of mankind, the Devil, perceiving these exercises in the spiritual warfare, was sorely hurt, and omitted not to persecute the devout Master, being jealous of this good beginning and of his pious deeds—for Satan feared that through the example and industrious preaching of Florentius the spoils of many souls would be taken from him; therefore he stirred up certain adversaries to impugn the simple life of this just man with harsh words and derision, as is the wont of such men to use, hoping to withdraw him from the good course which he had begun. But Florentius, being a man of gentle mind and well disposed to bear reproach for Christ's sake, was moved neither by evil report nor by the lies of them that would belittle him, for these things weighed lightly upon him as spider's webs, so that he continued constant in his good undertaking. He walked meekly among the perverse, and patiently amid slanderers, returning to no man evil for evil, but with a quiet heart he said his prayers, and either held his peace, or bridled the mouth of foolish men with some reasonable word. Fools railed against that which they did not comprehend, and one who walked humbly and avoided every vanity seemed to their froward understanding to be distraught.

(2) But with modest aspect, like some flower

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

of the field, Florentius went forth clad in a gray habit covered by a long cloak; and as some lily may grow among thorns and give forth her sweet odour when torn thereby, so was Florentius among his mockers; when derided he became yet more cheerful and made the sweet odour of his fame yet sweeter and more widely diffused by the patience which he showed. The Lord put upon him the breastplate of faith, and armed His warrior with the virtue of perseverance so that the wantonness of men might not prevail to overturn his stable mind, which the Grace of God had strengthened within him; for he was zealous to suffer shame and threatenings for the Name of Jesus, knowing that which is written; "Blessed are ye when men shall speak evil of you and reproach your name as evil for the Son of Man's Sake." Therefore he waited diligently upon the Author of Life, Jesus the Son of God, Whom the Pharisees called a Samaritan and a deceiver; Who warned His disciples beforehand that they must suffer much enmity from worldlings, for that He himself before them suffered yet more bitter things from the envious Jews, "For," saith He, "if they have persecuted Me, they shall also persecute you"; "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have called the good man of the house Beelzebub, how much more them of his household?"

By these holy words he was mightily comforted, and cared not for the mockings of men, nor turned aside from the true path of humility which the truth doth teach, but through his contempt of the world and self-denial he strove to climb to the very heights of virtue. He chose rather to be called an outcast Lollard with his Brothers, or to be

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

thought a madman by worldlings, than to be reputed a great lord and master. Therefore so far as in him lay he put aside the honourable title of Master, and desired to be called by his name only, as did also the other Brothers, though some of these were sufficiently learned and sprung from the wealthier families in the world. He would have nothing costly or beautiful by way of apparel, he desired nothing delicate for his food, he allowed only those things necessary for use, but nothing superfluous; naught save those somewhat simple and unadorned things which tend to lowliness and are no offence to worldlings—for these latter are taught better by an example of lowliness than by subtle arguments. Therefore by following the Common Life, and showing brotherly love to all; by being not highminded but condescending to things of low estate, he was now esteemed as a loving father and not feared as an austere master; for the outward signs of an honest character and the inward virtue of heavenly purity were seen reflected in him as in the brightest mirror.

CHAPTER X

Of his promotion to the priesthood and the abasement of his humility

(1)



UT since the humble do deservedly gain repute, and just praise is befitting to the meek, they who formerly were used to oppose the man of God did withhold their tongues from their unjust enmity, for they saw the constancy of his mind, and that his resolve in the Lord was firm.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

Wherefore being converted to a dutiful regard for Florentius they began to commend the holiness of his life and to reverence him for the modesty of his garb and discipline, and also to love the devout zeal of his Brothers, which was founded upon the lowliness of Christ. And this indeed justly, for it was meet and right that one upon whom the Grace of God was poured out, making him blossom with many virtues, should be loved and extolled by all men. As the fame of his goodness increased, many clerks and lay folk came together in crowds to his house to hear the Word of God, and some of the Councillors and leaders of the State came to him for counsel, inasmuch as there was found in him the Wisdom of God, and in proportion to the greater virtue of his mind, a faith also greater than their own. Wherefore they heard him gladly and committed their consciences to him the more confidently in difficult and dark matters; and having listened to his words they did many good deeds that were pleasing to God.

(2) So the humble Master, filled with Charity, rejoiced over this harvest of souls and the spiritual progress of his Brethren, and was very careful for the needs of poor clerks, paying reverence to Christ the Lord in them. But the venerable Master Gerard, seeing that his beloved disciple Florentius was adorned with special gifts of devotion, determined that he should be promoted to the Priesthood, being moved thereunto by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and urged by the prayers of many Brethren. But Florentius, protesting that he was unworthy of so great an honour, humbly sought to be relieved of this burden; yet he was overborne by the insistence of

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

the Brethren, and at length not daring to resist the monitions of Gerard he gave that assent to which the duty of obedience compelled him. But when he became a Priest he was not puffed up with human pride but was found to be so much the more humble in every deed, and in his garb, in proportion as he became greater in dignity and rank. Master Gerard has borne this witness of him, saying: "Once only did I cause a man to be ordained to the priesthood and I believe that he is worthy. In future I will be cautious not to do such a thing lightly, for I perceive that few are fit for such a calling."

Yet Florentius, as one that in his own eyes was truly small and of no worth, had no high thoughts of himself for his Ordination as a Priest; but in his heart he preferred the lower Brethren before himself, and spoke thus of a certain simple Clerk who was not yet admitted to the holy office: "Would that I could offer before the Judgement Seat of God the pen of that Clerk rather than the Chalice of my Priesthood."

CHAPTER XI

How seldom he went out, and of his instructive demeanour as he stood in the Choir

(1)



BY his good and honourable character Florentius, the Lord's man, might easily be recognized by ignorant men and worldlings as one that was devout and the friend of God, and worthy to be the Vicar of Jesus Christ. At first therefore he was made

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

Canon of St. Peter's Church in Utrecht, but resigning this prebend he accepted a Cure in Deventer, that he might be near Master Gerard and be instructed by his example and doctrine; wherefore he once said to a friend, "I hope that I shall not be a Canon all my life, but serve God in some lower station," and thus it came to pass to the eternal glory of God; for though he was held in great reverence for his holiness and abstinence, yet he utterly avoided honour from men, and for this cause refused to go out into public places and thought it his sole comfort to abide at home with his Brethren, for he knew that thereby he would make more progress himself and that his conduct would be an example of stability of purpose to others. And when he did go out into the streets he walked quickly, nowhere engaging in much talk; but saluting any acquaintance who met him with some brief word or an inclination of the head only; moreover, he paid so little heed to any outward manifestations of respect toward himself that often he did not notice those who met him, nor care to inquire whither they were going; but as he went to the Church he would pray or meditate of God as the Holy Spirit moved him.

(2) But owing to his great bodily weakness and the oft infirmities which fell upon him by reason of his excessive abstinence in the first fervour of his devotion, he could not go daily into the Choir; yet on all great festivals, and on the anniversaries of Saints he rejoiced to attend Vespers so often as his health allowed, and to be present at High Mass. And though he was the senior Vicar in Deventer he always took his place on the left side of the Choir in the lower stall, although he was entitled to the highest seat next to the Canons.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

As he stood in the Choir he did not gaze about with wandering eyes, but stood very quietly turning towards the Altar, with all restraint and reverence. Being devoutly intent upon God and his own soul, he sang the Psalms so far as his weakness allowed in a low tone, observing the musical directions. He was so reverent and his aspect was so devout that many boys and chanters often gazed at him and admired his religious fervour, since no light-mindedness, for which he might be blamed, could be seen in any word or gesture. At that time I used to go into the Choir with the other scholars as I was ordered to do by Master John Boheme, who ruled the Scholars and Choristers strictly. And as often as I saw my Master Florentius standing there—though he did not look round—I was careful not to chatter, for I was awed by his presence because of the reverence of his posture.

(3) Once on a time it happened when I was standing near him in the Choir that he turned to share our book for the chanting, and he, standing behind me, put his hands upon my shoulder—but I stood still, hardly daring to move, bewildered with gratification at so great an honour. There were then in the Chapter of Deventer divers Canons and Vicars who were learned and men of approved life, strict and eager to perform the Divine Offices with all due honour; these held Master Florentius, that man of God, in reverence and deserved esteem, and when he was present, the more anxiously restrained all extravagance and levity; and the whole Choir was enlightened by the instructive demeanour of this great priest.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER XII

Of the simplicity of his garb

(1)



HE good Florentius, being a lover of simplicity and lowliness, knew that an ornate attire doth not make the Priest, but rather lowliness of heart and righteousness of character, and therefore put away from him all adornment in attire and everything that pertained to the pomps of the world and ostentation before men, so as to preserve the better his purity of conscience. So after that he was made a priest he sought not softer clothing as being more appropriate to himself than to others, but was contented with the Common and simple garb like the rest of the Brothers, and this he did that the outer garb might answer to the inner man. For having God ever before his eyes, he did not love that adornment and care for the body which passeth away, but kept his eye open to see the virtues of the soul.

(2) Yet he was careful not to give the least occasion of offence to the weak, either by his garb, or by anything that is a necessity of nature, choosing according to Christ's example that which is more proper to lowliness and in less esteem amongst men. Therefore he did not wear one garment on festivals and another on ordinary days, but only a more highly ornamented vestment at the Celebration of Mass on Feast Days for his reverence to the Sacrament, and in this he kept within the bounds of due decency.

The almuce that he wore was somewhat old and

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

faded, and was in many places moth-eaten and threadbare. When I saw him come across to the Choir in such a garment I was grieved that a priest so good and honourable should go about in such mean and lowly garments. He did not wear elegant sandals like other Vicars in the Church, but in place thereof low and coarse wooden shoes, soled with old leather, which made no clatter as he entered the Choir. His cloak and robe were of grey cloth, for though his uncle who loved him had given him a new robe, he would not wear it because it seemed too honourable, and he ever preferred simple things to costly. His hood was black, or dark in colour, and so worn as to cover both shoulders and the bare part of the neck, for so it was made for him. He wore scanty sleeves tied back with but few strings, the hinder parts were patched from time to time with new cloth as they wore through with age, for this humble priest of God did not blush to wear an ancient garment patched by the tailor, and indeed he and all his Brothers contended in holy rivalry which should wear the meaner garments, and each strove to surpass the other in this regard.

(3) On one occasion, when a Secular Priest was present, Florentius was discoursing devoutly of God, and his hearer standing near him was busied with the beautiful and curiously embroidered sleeves which he wore, turning his hands now in this direction now in that and Florentius looking kindly at him said: "My brother, see what sort of sleeves I wear, they do not occupy my mind nor disquiet me. To wear such long ones as thou dost would be a weariness and a burden to me." Hearing this, and blushing somewhat, the other stood more quietly and tak-

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

ing the saying in good part, went away edified, being instructed in simplicity of attire by the example of Florentius.

(4) At another time he called to him the tailor who was to make him a new cloak, and said: "Sir, do you know how to make a mean garment?" and he answered: "I know not that I can do so, but tell me, Sir, what sort of garment thou dost desire?" Then said the humble Master Florentius to the tailor: "Make of that cloth four parts, and sew them together without folds that I may put on or take off the garment easily; so made it will be good enough for me." To this the tailor wondering much replied: "O my beloved Master, how can this be? How can I wilfully destroy a good piece of cloth? I will make it well as is more suitable." Then said the meek and lowly priest: "Why should one take care for the adorning of the outward man? For the love of God make it in the simplest way thou canst; for so is it more pleasing to me; since it is fitting that I should have simple garments for the edification of others."

O noble Priest of Christ! who wert ever inclined to lowliness, who the better to please God didst put away all delicate living from thee!

CHAPTER XIII

Of his humble service among the Brothers

(1)



CHRIST, the Light of the World, came into the world to enlighten the minds of the faithful by preaching the Word of Heavenly Life, and it was chiefly by the example of His humility that He did kindle

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

the sullen hearts of sinners to love His Name; and He left this example as a pattern to all the faithful throughout the earth. For Christ so bore Himself among His disciples as if He were one of them, showing them the ministry of love and not exercising the lordship of power, so that if any is willing to imitate Him, the same is worthy to be honoured by Him, and to be made a ruler of all good things in the Kingdom of Heaven: for He saith: "I am in the midst of you as He that serveth," and again: "The Son of Man is not come to be ministered unto but to minister and to give His life to many." This rule of holy servitude Florentius that humble servant of Christ was zealous to follow with the Brothers, persuading all that came to him of whatever age they might be to take their turn of servile work in love and in turn to bear the common burden, to shrink from no menial task, but gladly to occupy themselves with humble service, embracing the more eagerly those tasks which are deemed less honourable and are harder and more toilsome.

(2) So there grew up amongst them this holy custom, and approved virtue, that every one of the Brothers should do service for a week in the kitchen, and should there cook with all humility, or promptly and cheerfully fulfill the injunctions of the cook. For at that time all were ardent to perform the less honourable tasks, inasmuch as to labour with their hands for the Kingdom of God was thought to be a pleasant recreation. So Florentius, the good Father and kindly Master, wishing to set a good example before those whom he ruled, himself took his turn in the kitchen as far as he could, and when a neighbour, moved by compassion, said to him: "Why, good Sir, dost

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

thou occupy thyself in the kitchen? Hast thou none that can do this for thee? Would it not be better that thou shouldest go to the Church, and another cook for thee?" the humble servant of Christ answered: "Should I not rather strive for this to gain the prayers of all the other Brothers rather than my own prayers alone. For during the time that I am in the kitchen all the others are constrained to pray for me? I hope therefore to gain a greater blessing from the prayers of those that are in the Church than I could if I alone were praying."

Thus he edified them all both by example and precept, seeking not what was pleasant to himself, but what was useful to others and a good example. Whenever he took his meals with the Brothers he placed the first dish upon the table with his own hands; and he grieved much because through the hindrance of his infirmity he was not able to take his place every day at the Common table of the Brotherhood. For this cause he used to eat in the kitchen alone with the cook, having a small table meanly served, because the weakness of his stomach suffered him not to take solid food. I myself, unworthy as I am, often made ready his table at his request, and brought from the buttery that modest draught which he desired, and I gladly served him with much cheerfulness of spirit.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER XIV

How he laboured with his hands for the common good

(1)



FLORENTIUS, who excelled all others in his character, and is worthy to be remembered as being among these devout men the most devout of all, never wished to be found in idleness, but strove to expend his precious time in some fruitful work, being careful above all things—although he was the holder of a benefice—not to eat his bread for naught and without working therefor. And what he learned and received from Master Gerard, this he carefully observed; for it was the Master's opinion that none should be admitted to the Community save he who was willing—according to the saying of St. Paul—to labour with his hands. For this is an holy occupation and one most profitable to all spiritual progress; hereby are the lusts of the flesh tamed, and the mind is the more readily bridled, being distracted from idle wanderings. By such work is hurtful indolence taken away, and thus we more easily avoid those foolish babblings which through such indolence do arise. And when the opportunity for chattering is taken from us, the work doth go forward under our hand, and he will ever be more fruitful in good who shall have been a faithful labourer. By this also is a wise provision made for the necessities of the Brothers, and the miseries of the poor are more freely relieved, for Almsgiving from those gains that are won in the sweat of the face are

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

the more pleasing in the sight of God and more spotless, and the profit of honest labour doth relieve the indigent. For this reason the art of copying books was eagerly taken up by the brethren of his house in the earlier days, for this is more convenient for clerks than other work, and can be pursued more quietly, and it was introduced as their customary occupation for the common good. The venerable Father Florentius himself set a bright example before the copyists that his title as their superior might not seem an empty one, and that he might enhance his priestly office by being a pattern of industry; wherefore he busied himself with smoothing the parchment and ruling and arranging the pages. For though he was less skilful as a copyist, yet with his own hand—though consecrated with the holy oil—he gave great help to the other writers by preparing all things necessary for their use.

(2) Occasionally, as opportunity arose and time permitted, he with a chosen companion would read and correct the books already written, or compile Sacred extracts from Holy Scripture for the consolation of the Brothers, or as exercises for others of the household; for he delighted and greatly rejoiced when he could spend his day in doing some good for the Community, knowing that this would be most pleasing to God. But owing to the multitude of clerks who came together to him when the fame of his goodness was noised further abroad his help was demanded by many persons outside the Brotherhood, both religious and learned men. Wherefore in the interest of the salvation of souls, it was fitting for him to engage himself upon higher matters, and often to abstain from his own personal affairs or from

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS


private study, and to prefer Spiritual gain before temporal advantages.

(3) Sometimes so many stood before his cell desiring to speak with and consult him, or to confess their secrets to a man so holy, that there was scarcely room for him to come forth, and he had barely time to spare for reciting the Hours and attending duly to the needs of the body; yet he left none uncomforted, but either settled the matter out of hand, or, if his petitioner desired it left him free to return to him on a future occasion. It happened sometimes that he began to recite the Hours, but could not finish the Psalm which he had begun because so many came to him one after the other; and that he might not yield to weariness and refuse to open the door to him that knocked, he said to himself, "Once more for the sake of God," and this "once more" he did often repeat till "once" became "often," for in his brotherly love he did patiently overcome the hardships and unrestfulness of these interruptions.

CHAPTER XV

*Of his compassion toward the poor, the sick,
and the friendless*

(1)

 **A**MONGST other works of piety the virtue of compassion did especially grow and flourish in the heart of the good Father, a virtue which he showed and exercised by the frequent distribution of alms to the poor and to strangers; wherefore in justice one ought to say of him as is said of the righteous

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

man in the Psalm: "He hath distributed, he hath given to the poor, his justice remaineth for ever," for indeed he was a most loving father to the poor, a most kindly comforter to those in distress, and a most compassionate visitor of the sick. Being filled with the Spirit of God, he had the milk of compassion, and the wine of zeal and fervour, and did nurture the weak with the oil of Mercy; while he hated their evil passions and sins, yet he did display his detestation thereof and his mercy each in due season and with great discretion.

(2) He often sent meats that were for his own table to the sick and needy, and the herbs which were sent to him in charity, he with a charity still greater would share with others that did lack. He kept the names of the poor written down, and committed the care of them to one or two of the Brothers, bidding them provide for their honourable entertainment and the expenses of their maintenance. There were at that time certain honourable persons in the town of Deventer who feared God, men of good conversation who followed the counsels of Florentius, and certain Matrons wealthy and devout who were given up to charitable deeds, attending the Church of God regularly and honouring His priests. These ministered to God's poor clerks with much kindness, and at the request and instance of Florentius did most willingly serve them. So good and beloved was the humble vicar of Christ in the eyes of all that if he made a petition on behalf of any poor man, he soon obtained his request. He showed himself affable to the friendless and to strangers as if they were his friends and kinsmen, asking whence they came, and how they were called, begging them to come sometimes to visit him.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

(3) This notable lover of Chastity hid not the light of his benevolence from the little ones, and the young who were striving after innocence of life and purity, but with pious words taught them to love Jesus and Mary, exhorting them to preserve their innocence, that being made like to the angels of God they might sing the Song of the Virgins in Heaven. To the sad and tempted he was cheerful and comfortable, so that if any were troubled or offended, the sight of Florentius, and a few words from him, would give such an one peace and consolation and he would return joyfully to his own business. This I have often tried in mine own person, as have my comrades in devotion, for we were instructed by his counsel and taught in the School of Christ by his excellent discourses. He did not shrink from lepers or others who were marred by any bodily deformity, but rather took care to show himself more kindly than usual to such outcasts, knowing that this was more pleasing to the Creator, and would gain greater glory for himself, because he thought upon the bond of Nature, and the image of God in man rather than the vileness of the person.

(4) I have seen one blind of an eye, and another lame of one foot, who were converted by him, and afterward became men of approved life. I knew also a leper who abode outside the city walls who in the grace of devotion came near to God's priest, and spoke with him as a friend; and many saw this and wondered at the humility of the Master in sitting by a leper. He also commanded that a draught of wine and a special dole should be given to the man, and after speaking many words of holy comfort to him he let him go away to his own abode with his companion.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER XVI

Of his feeding the poor, and washing beggars

(1)

BUT because as Holy Scripture teacheth, God loveth a cheerful giver, it is pleasant to tell further of the great compassion shown by this most charitable father—Florentius—toward the poor and those that were full of sores, the maimed, and such as had no friends to comfort them. Besides the alms that were applied daily to pious purposes in relieving mendicants, Florentius, this most pitiful father of the indigent, used to invite to his table twelve poor scholars every year, on the Feast of S. Gregory the Pope, in honour of that Saint, because he had read how Gregory himself used to entertain twelve poor men every day. I myself also by his direction brought to his house at dinner time certain poor persons whom he named to me, and these being refreshed with food and drink returned with joyful hearts to their Schools and rendered thanks to God for the benefits they had received, and expressed deep thankfulness to Florentius and his Brotherhood for their abundant hospitality. Then was most clearly fulfilled that saying of the Psalmist, which is chanted as a Grace before meat by many Religious orders: “The poor shall eat and be filled, they shall praise the Lord that seek Him, their hearts shall live for ever and ever.”

(2) So too, in the month of May, the Season when the wild herbs that are used as medicaments have their highest virtue, the good Father did not

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

forget his poor; knowing that many were weak, ulcerous, and full of sores, he made them to come to his house upon an appointed day and hour to receive certain medicines, and to have their bodies bathed in warm water infused with aromatic herbs. And when they had been thoroughly bathed and washed he made ready for each a most cleanly bed for sudorific treatment. And after receiving a cup of wine, and some words of comfort, they went away with great joy to their own homes, saying one to the other, "How good and loving a man is this Lord Florentius! and how good are the Brethren who dwell with him! in that they give us such things for the Sake of God without money and without price!"

(3) Once about the Season of Lent, at a time of scarcity, when poor mendicants were borne down by want, many fled for refuge to the tender-hearted Father imploring comfort from him, hoping to find some relief, for no one ever came away from him empty or uncomforted. In this distressful time Florentius, the Father of pity, was filled with sympathy for the pain of those that suffered hunger, and for the devout poor, taking counsel with the Brothers as to the best way of succouring the needy who were in such straits that they had neither money in their purse, nor bread in their scrip. Then were the Brothers one and all fired with desire to help these multitudes of poor, especially at this Holy Season of Lent, which is observed as a time of Penance at which one ought to expend larger sums in Charity upon the needy who with many prayers ask for bread in the Name of God—as saith the Prophet Esias: "Deal thy bread to the hungry and bring the needy and the harbourless into thy house; when thou shalt

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

see one naked, cover him, and despise not thine own flesh." Therefore the Brothers did firmly determine to deny themselves somewhat and to contribute more largely to the poor, and for their sake add one hour of daily work to the usual period of labour throughout the Season of Quaresima: and to hand the whole that they might gain by their copying in that hour to the Overseer of the poor, that therewith he might buy them the necessary victual and faithfully minister to them. The same was done by certain Brethren that were copyists and writers in other Religious Houses who of their own labour offered a sacrifice of alms to God, chastening themselves of their own will and refreshing the poor in all gladness.

(4) Who can worthily unfold all the pitiful acts of this most blessed Father toward the poor and strangers, but particularly toward the simple and them that are of the devout Household of Christ? But though all should be silent yet will I not hold my peace, but will continually sing of the compassions of Florentius, for by mine own experience did I prove the multitude of his mercies surely and without doubt during seven years of his life. Like the blessed Job indeed "He was feet to the lame, and eyes was he to the blind, an hand to the needy, a staff to the feeble, a comfort to the fallen, a cloak to him that was scantily clad." One did rejoice for the alms that were given him, another for the coat that was made for him, one would take away a cloak, another a hat, another shoes, another boots; another would receive a girdle and hosen, another books; another would rejoice that he had asked and received pens, ink, and paper. Thus each one rejoicing in his own gift would confess that from this honourable Lord Florentius,

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

the father of the orphan and the needy, he had received not goods for the use of the body only, but also a medicine for his soul. My weak tongue doth not suffice to tell fully of his virtues and charitable deeds, for his conversation and that of his brethren doth surpass the reckoning of man.

It is just that I should not fear to say of them what is written of the Apostolic Saints: "They are men of mercy and their just deeds have not been forgotten. Their good works remain with their posterity, and all the Church of the Saints shall tell of their almsgiving."

CHAPTER XVII

Of his abstinence and the infirmities which came upon him by reason of his austerity

(1)



HIS fervent and devout servant of God did chastise his body too rigorously with fast and watching when first he was converted; in the endeavour to restrain the concupiscence of the flesh, he did not consider with due care the weakness of his nature, but in the fervour of his spirit did so persecute the enemy within him, that by the weight of his austerity he did also overthrow one that had heretofore dwelt within him in friendship and loyalty. For he not only abstained from what was unlawful and superfluous, but also denied himself things necessary, so that he lost all appetite for food, and had no taste for the discerning of meats. Wherefore it once happened that in the absence of the cook he went into the buttery and drank oil out of a

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

jar mistaking it for beer; nor did he know the difference until the cook asked him from which of the jars he had drunk, and then he knew of his mistake. At another time, at a certain Monastery, a draught of wine was brought him to drink by reason of his weakness and because of the loving care which the Brothers had for him, and when he had tasted thereof he said to one that stood by, "How sharp and bitter ye make your beer"; and the Brothers marvelled that he knew not the taste of wine from that of any other liquor. Therefore he took his victual for the more part as if he did not taste it, and rather because Nature compelled him to eat than because appetite or the flavour of any meat attracted him.

(2) Sometimes I went to visit him in his cell, where he sat upon his couch in bodily weakness, and I spoke to him with sympathy, being much grieved for his sickness. And once Brother James of Viana, who at that time ministered to him, brought him a strengthening decoction of herbs, saying, "These are good herbs; I pray thee take thereof, are they not pleasant to the taste?" Then I heard Florentius answer, "A crust of bread would be more savoury to you than this is to me." But although he was very weak and was compassed about by many infirmities of the body, yet did he not cease from the work of God and from gathering an holy harvest of souls. When he was strong enough to admit them to come to him he gave to those that sought him the counsels of salvation with renewed fervour. And these became the sweeter to his hearers as they were more and more assured that Florentius was beloved of God and was being tried by various bodily infirmities, as the precious gold is tried in the fire.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER XVIII

*How he often recovered by the aid of the prayers
of the devout*

(1)



WHILE he suffered continually in the flesh yet was he instant in rendering thanks to God with all diligence, because the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the gaining of the glory of God to come. And he bore with patience the rod of the Lord "that was uplifted against him, as an wholesome discipline for his soul," bethinking him that this was a sign of love, as the Apostle saith, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Our good Lord, desiring to show how greatly the tried virtue of His sons doth please Him, and how the prayers of the righteous do avail much, showed mercy toward His beloved priest, who was often brought to the very extremity of weakness, though the physicians thought that there was no hope of saving his life by any human means. Florentius himself put all his hope in the Lord, Who with His saving grace doth raise up the deserving. So often therefore as perilous sickness did assail him he was commended to the fervent daily prayers of the neighbouring Religious Communities of Brothers, Clerks, and Nuns, that they might implore God to spare him yet a little, and save his life for the weal of many; and that the devout might not suffer sorrow upon sorrow as they must if they were bereft of a Father so beloved and a director so necessary to them.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

(2) I myself sometimes was the messenger on such an occasion, and said to the Nuns, "Pray for our lord Florentius, for his sickness is heavy upon him." And behold, the merciful God, who despiseth not the prayer of the poor, but doth readily hear the vows of the humble, restored his beloved and faithful servant to health, "to make known His power to the sons of men."

(3) In those days there was one renowned for his knowledge of medicine, named Everard Eza, Curate of Almelo, a man of much skill and repute amongst the doctors of medicine; this man, being inspired by the grace of the Religious Life, became the familiar friend of Florentius and his Brothers, and others who were vowed to Christ; he was wont to come often to Florentius, and to give him freely the relief that his art afforded; and the Brothers loved him much and received him with reverence. He showed great diligence to heal his beloved friend, and was often very helpful to him; also he relieved the sadness of the Brothers, and consoled them by his confidence that there was hope that the life of Florentius would be saved, saying to them, "I do put my faith in God rather than in the art of medicine, considering this namely, that it doth surpass human strength for one to have lived so long with such a weakly body, and unless the special grace of God were preserving him, and the prayers of many were being offered for him, he would immediately die, or rather he would have been dead long since. It is good, therefore, to pray faithfully for him, for the saving of his life doth depend particularly upon the Grace of God."

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER XIX

*How upon an Easter Even he was healed by a
Vision of Angels*

(1)

HIS sickness came upon him more grievously and oftener during the season of Lent than at other times in the year because the Lenten fare was somewhat trying and ill to digest; but though at this season his bodily weakness was greater yet he offered himself to keep the fast with a mind even more cheerful than usual; once his strength so drooped owing to his abstaining almost entirely from food—and the consequent weakness of his stomach—that there was scarcely a hope that he could live till Easter. But the devout prayers of the Brothers cried without ceasing to God for him, and they implored that answering Grace Which they had often known before. At that time all human aid was failing and they had recourse to the power of God, that mightiest source of comfort.

(2) So when the fast was over and the glorious Festival of the Lord's Resurrection was at hand, this chosen man of God was resting on his bed steeped in a sweet sleep; and behold! on this most holy Paschal night he was thought worthy to receive the comfort and consolation of an Angelic vision. He saw two angels appear before him, one standing upon the right side of his bed and the other upon the left; one lifted up his hand and brandished a sword over the head of the sleeper, as if in act to strike, but the other stayed the blow, and forbade him, saying, "Smite him

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

not, for his life shall yet be whole within him and he shall not die." Amazed at this vision sent from heaven, Florentius awoke, raised as it were from death to life and wondrously comforted in the Lord; calling his servant—who was sleeping in the cell near at hand—he said, in a confident voice, "Arise, and prepare me something to eat to-day; I feel that I am mending, and we must keep feast in the Lord together!" Then the servant, filled with great joy, hastened to do as Florentius commanded, and all who heard thereof were filled with amazement and joy that he who they had lately feared must die had begun so quickly to amend.

(3) This vision he afterward told to his uncle, the Canon of St. Mary's Church in Utrecht, who loved him with all his heart. He did not name himself, but told how it was revealed to a certain man that he should live awhile longer. Upon this his uncle did congratulate him greatly, and blessed God who had sent His Angel and saved Florentius from the destruction of death.

The illustrious Florentius lived for several years after this, to the comfort of all devout persons, both clerks and lay folk, who came to him from divers parts and countries for the healing of their souls: for this man of God and the Community of Brothers, who were gathered together in his house, became by their precept and example leaders in holy conversation to such devout persons, to the Glory of God Almighty.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER XX

Of one who fell into a well and was drawn out unhurt

(1)



IT happened upon a time that many came together to the ancient house of the beloved Father Florentius to hear the Word of God, and while he was discoursing to them with holy exhortation, a certain man who was sitting with others on the edge of a well was overcome with sleep and fell back headlong into the water. All who were present were terrified by his fall and looked down into the well lamenting the mischance—and behold! by the protection of God the man stood safe and unhurt upon his feet in the water of the well, to the wonder of all. And hastily seizing a pole which hung above they let it down through the well's mouth and drew forth alive the man who, as they had thought, was almost drowned and dead. Seeing him freed from so great danger they rendered thanks to God Almighty, and were not a little comforted in that He had not allowed one to suffer sudden death in that house.

(2) This was told me by a citizen of Kempen who was present at the time and as a youth had been often in Deventer; he also told me many good things of this man of God and his Brotherhood. I have often drawn water for use in the kitchen out of this same well, which is somewhat narrow, and therefore the thing that was done doth tend yet more strongly to the Glory of God, who is present to save lives from danger, beyond all that we ask of Him.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER XXI

Of the vision of the Rood which appeared over his house

(1)



HIS Community of Brothers dwelling in the house of Florentius was wholly pleasing to God and beloved of Him, and being gathered together to His praise was refulgent with virtue and adorned with lofty and meritorious deeds. Lowliness, which therein was the chief of all virtues, was sought after by all from the lowest to the highest; and did make a Paradise of this earthly house, transforming mortal men into heavenly pearls to be as living stones meet for glory in the temple of God.

(2) Here under the strict discipline of the Rule, obedience, the mother of virtue, and the lamp of discernment, so flourished, that to obey without hesitation became the highest wisdom, and for one to neglect the counsel or lightest word of his Superior would have been a deed of horror and disgrace.

Here the inward manifestations of love, that is for God, and its outward manifestation, that is charity to one's neighbour, burned with so hot a flame that the hard hearts of sinners who heard the holy discourses of the Brothers were melted to tears, and they that had come thither cold at heart, being there kindled by the fire of the Word, went away rejoicing, heedful to sin no more. Here the armour of spiritual warfare was kept bright for use against the several sins of man, and old and young alike did learn to fight bravely

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

against the devil, their own flesh, and the deceits of the world. Here the memory of the ancient Fathers, and the pattern of the holy conversation of the monks of Egypt—which had lain as it were half dead upon the earth—were restored to life; and the manner of life of the clergy rose to that standard of the highest perfection which was set by the practice of the Primitive Church.

Here were heard devout exhortations to the spiritual warfare. Here amid their daily meditations the Brothers did full often dwell upon that most holy and sorrowful Passion of our Saviour Jesus Christ in loving recollection, and ruminare thereupon; because to recall that Passion and to dwell upon It doth surely conduce to the soul's health, doth avail to cure the deadly bite of the serpent, to calm the tempests of passion in the heart, and to uplift the dullard mind from things of earth to things of Heaven through the imitation of the Crucified Lord.

(3) And because the ardour of their devout thanksgiving, and their remembrance of the benefits that God had bestowed upon them leaped up as a flame in the hearts of many; and because this holy Community was ever making progress to still better things, being instructed by the example of the revered father Florentius utterly to despise the world; therefore the good God Who giveth His blessing and grace to the humble, failed not to cherish His faithful servants by giving to them holy comfort and inward joy. Bringing forward one instance out of many I will add here in a few words the story of a marvellous sight, which God Who knoweth all hidden things thought good to show above that house which He had consecrated with unction from on high.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

(4) There was a devout disciple of Florentius, a young branch of his planting, who was startled by a strange vision in the night, and at first was altogether afraid, but afterward was made joyful by the wondrous and divine power of God. For as he lay upon his pallet, a mighty wind arose from the north, and there came a fierce tempest shaking all the earth as if the day of the Last Judgement were at hand, that day which all flesh must fear. Terror-stricken at this dreadful tempest the young man began to think how he should flee, and whither turn aside from the face of the wrath of God; but being caught in a strait place he looked upward to Heaven, and lo! there was seen clearly in the sky the sign of the Cross bearing the Figure of Christ, the Author of our Salvation. And as he gazed upon this holy Figure of the Crucified, pendent in the air with hands outstretched and pierced with the nails, the glory of Whose Presence doth lighten all the world, the tempest ceased. And the Rood moved onward until It stood over the house of Florentius where dwelt those that truly despised the world, the servants of the Holy Cross, at Whose coming and before Whose Presence the whole house was lifted from its foundations as if to meet the Saviour, and nowhere touched the ground; and after bending reverently towards the Cross it returned again to its former stable position; but the Image of the Cross went onward and stood above the wall over against the door of the house through which the Brothers went forth day by day. Seeing these things the young man spread forth his hands toward the Cross and began to pray and implore to be protected from the fear of the dread Judgement, and straightway he was caught up from

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

where he lay and placed within the door of Florentius' house as if in a place of safety beneath the Wings of the Crucified. Then being overjoyed and, as it were, safe from every danger, he awoke in unspeakable gladness, and, wondering greatly, returned thanks to God who had thought good to give him such a revelation concerning the holy Brotherhood to which he was zealously from thenceforth to cleave, and continually to reverence the life thereof which was hid with Christ.

CHAPTER XXII

Of his patience, gentleness, and love toward all men

(1)



CERTAIN Senator, who relied upon his own worldly cunning, was not afraid to trouble Master Florentius, this man of God, but shamelessly strove to deprive him of his benefice, thinking perchance that no one would oppose him, or answer on behalf of Christ's vicar, who seemed to be devout and meek towards them that did him hurt. But when the cause came on and Florentius should have answered his adversary as to the plaint against him, the Master made use of no wordy argument or eloquent pleading, but replied shortly and humbly after this manner: "If ye have a better right than I, in the Name of God maintain it." And they that stood by wondered, and were edified at his words.

(2) But one of the canons, a man zealous for God, who would not suffer the just and innocent

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

to be oppressed, said to him, "Beloved Master, why dost thou speak thus? Hast thou so little care to keep thy benefice? Yet shall not the enemy gain that which he seeketh, but we on thy behalf will look to it that thou keep that which thou dost rightfully possess." The adversary hearing these words was silent, and departed, having gained nothing, for indeed all men knew, both high and low alike, that the devout Master was a worthy Priest of Christ, and one whose life and doctrine had led many to despise the world. For he had made them that were aforetime great and worldly-wise to become lowly and simple-minded brothers, and some that were sufficiently instructed for the devout life and the dignity of the Priesthood, he had made able ministers therein as the sevenfold grace of the Holy Ghost increased in them.

(3) But he thought it his greatest gain and chiefest joy to have shown to any the way of eternal salvation, and to have recalled them from sinfulness to continence; for these things he was revered by men of the world, honoured by the great, and most tenderly loved by the good and the devout; his earnest life, his love of God, made perfect; his dutifulness to his neighbour, his bounty toward the poor, his honesty to his fellows, his kindness to the afflicted made him to be so beloved of all. Wherefore one said of him: "There is no Monk whom I love and respect so much as Florentius; I look upon him as upon an Angel of God." He, however, took no pleasure in his own reputation, but rather in the conversion of men and the progress of the Brotherhood, whose numbers were increased daily, for in his time the Lord bestowed His Grace without stint upon them. For this cause his name, which was in great esteem,

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

and the good report of his reputation reached even to strange cities, and men both in Deventer and afar off praised and commended him greatly. Yet he thought not of the praise that men gave him, nor weighed it at all; yea rather he held it worthless and derided it, for having cast his eye upon certain laudatory letters that were sent him he threw them behind a chest, saying, "Is this all of which they have to write? Good were it if they had said nothing on such a matter."

CHAPTER XXIII

Of his devout exhortation to spiritual prayer

(1)



MASTER FLORENTIUS, that notable fair flower of the priesthood, that fervid zealot for souls, not only took thought for the Brothers of his house, but was also instant in planting the seeds of the Word of Salvation amongst other neighbouring Communities of Clerks and from time to time communed with them and piously exhorted them to have peace and charity towards one another, either preaching himself, or sending some suitable Brother of his house. When he visited them all the inmates rejoiced, desiring to hear the Holy Word from the mouth of God's Priest, for the Holy Ghost spoke through his mouth to comfort that little Flock which was eagerly and devoutly willing to obey.

(2) In one of his discourses he spake this word of advice. "Every man should set before him daily these resolutions, namely, to earnestly strive to amend his life: to struggle anew against his

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

temptations; to pluck out his vices, to strive with special courage to overcome those sins which do more easily beset him; to do violence to himself for Christ's sake because 'the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away.'” It is profitable also for a man to lay his passions and perplexities bare before some discreet brother, one who hath tried knowledge of the Way of God. It is well not to strive in the light of one's own understanding only, but rather to trust another, to humbly receive his counsel, and gladly to follow him as a director, for this is a great help to those that are newly converted and a wholesome sign of spiritual progress.

Therefore a man who doth so resolve to serve God continually, diligently to amend his life and to keep himself carefully from all sin, doth thereby become more worthy and more acceptable than if he fed an hundred poor persons without making such a resolution to govern himself; because the greatest gift that man can offer to God is a good and perfect will to serve Him all the days of one's life. So long as a man doth abide by his holy purpose his death cannot be ill, for though he die, I do trust that he will be in a state of Salvation, and shall find mercy, because his intent was good, and a good will shall be counted to him for righteousness as if he had carried out his purpose: as holy David doth confess, saying, “O Lord, thou hast crowned us with a shield of thy good-will.”

Many other words of comfort spake he to strengthen the devout young men who were gathered together in his house from divers parts to employ their time in spiritual study, not in the School of learning only, but also in the School of Christ.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

(3) Some of these would note his words in a book, and eagerly show them to such as had been absent, quoting these words of Divine eloquence amongst themselves with a far keener zest than worldlings show in repeating witty sayings. He abstained altogether from dealing with deep questions, subtle arguments and difficult matters, knowing that such things yield but little edification to devout minds, but rather are often an hindrance to heartfelt repentance, and overturn the faith of the innocent. And thus it hath been found with many men, that those who looking closely into curious matters leave the plain and lowly way of Christ, do thereby sow into themselves the seeds of many falls and errors.

(4) A certain learned monk was once arguing with a Carthusian, on the ground that his order being devoted to that solitude and peace which give a man leisure for the things of his own soul, it would seem to produce scarcely any fruit in the Church of God; but the good monk made this wise and apt reply: "We would gladly do those things which ye preach and teach, but we believe that contempt of the world is better taught by acts of penitence than by beautiful sermons and many wanderings."

A certain Jew who had been converted to the Christian faith hearing the report of the holy life of Master Florentius, desired to confer with him about the Patriarchs and Prophets of old, because he was thought to be learned in the old law and in Hebrew, and was by many called "Rabbi," after the manner of the Jewish sect; and when he came into the presence of Florentius that Man of God received him kindly and heard him patiently, conferring with him in all gentleness and charity,

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

urging him to keep the true faith in Christ and to labour in good works; but as for those questions of the Law that pertain not to salvation, and those genealogies of the men of old, he would not breathe a word upon them, not because he was ignorant in such matters, but because they bring no edification.

CHAPTER XXIV

Of his effectual preaching and his knowledge of the Scriptures

(1)



HIS revered Priest preached not smooth flatteries, but testified clearly of the Truth; his aim was not worldly eloquence but simple instruction in conduct and to lead his hearers by reasoning to reject the world after the example of the Saints. He sought not money from the rich, nor honour among the great, but discoursed more freely with simple folk, on whose behalf he was instant with those in high places that they should be mindful of the poor, and "by means of the mammon of unrighteousness make to themselves friends in the habitations of the Kingdom of Heaven." Could any lightly refuse to hear his intercession? Verily he dared not do so lest an offended God should refuse to hear his own petitions.

(2) Once a priest who had charge of the Church of Deventer, and was a good friend to Florentius, came to him offering him service in sincere goodwill and said, "My beloved Master, if I can do anything to please thee, spare me not"; and that good father answered, "For the present time there

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

is nothing save that thou wouldest show thyself to be well disposed to the Brothers and Sisters who are placed in thy charge, that they be not troubled by them of the world and froward men"; and the other piously assenting to this, replied, "I will gladly do this for the love of God and of you all that ye may be also mindful of me."

Master John Boheme also, who was Rector of the Scholars, and Vicar of the Great Church, under whose direction I long attended the school, was a friend to Florentius, and heard him gladly, doing what he knew would be pleasing to God. And when the time to pay the fees was come, each scholar brought what was justly due, and I also put my fee into his hand and asked for a book which I had deposited as a pledge for payment. And he having some knowledge of me, and aware that I was under the care of Florentius, said, "Who gave thee this money?" and I answered, "My lord Florentius." "Then go," said he, "take back his money, since for love of him I will take nothing from thee." So I took back the money again to my lord, Florentius, and said, "The Master hath given back my fee for love of thee"; and Florentius said, "I thank him and will repay him, after another fashion with gifts more excellent than money." He knew by his discerning spirit what answer to make to everyone, and by his gift of counsel could supply an wholesome medicine both to the learned and unlearned, and all who sought aid for their divers needs, but he required no earthly reward for such service.

(3) Wherefore one who had committed himself to his direction said, "As often as I have followed the counsels of Florentius, it hath been well with me; but whensoever I have striven in the light of

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

mine own understanding evil hath ever happened to me, and I have repented that I acted not according to his direction. "His knowledge of the Holy Scriptures shone brightly like some ray from heaven within him, and his mind was illumined with so pure a light of divine radiance that whether he was reading the Old or New Testament some mystic interpretation of every passage came to him, and he everywhere found something to instruct him and lead him to God, the Fount of all knowledge and the End of every word. The books that he kept to his hand were simple moral Treatises, especially the "Mirror for Monks," and certain manuals of virtuous exercises against sin wherewith he trained himself and his fellow soldiers in Christ's army to fight triumphantly against the temptations of the devil. But the Novices, the inexperienced, and those that were swollen with worldly pride, and those that were yet tainted with love of carnal things, he did dissuade from studying deep and subtle questions, and from prying curiously into dark and doubtful matters.

(4) Therefore he taught that all such must first learn to humble themselves, to know well their own weakness, to submit themselves utterly to their Superiors, to prefer themselves before no man, to keep peace and amity with all, to have the fear of God ever in their heart, and having made their foundation sure in lowliness, at length by the indwelling grace of the Holy Ghost to climb to the height of clear knowledge and the light of that full vision of God which is promised to the pure in heart by that saying of the Lord, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

(5) They that seek to be thought subtle rather

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

than to be humble, and desire knowledge more than a good life are easily puffed up, and are carnally minded; such men Florentius would severely reprove, and recall to a wholesome knowledge of their own weakness by humiliation and frequent exercises of devotion. When it was necessary for him to impeach any, he was held in such awe that none ventured to contradict him, or excuse himself, by reason of the reverence inspired by his holy life, which none durst offend lest they should incur the wrath of God by not humbly obeying such directions.

CHAPTER XXV

How he set a guard upon his tongue and avoided oaths

(1)



ONCE when he was residing at Amersfoort he was received with all veneration by the inhabitants of that city and by the great men of the district, who visited him from time to time in pious devotion. Then also certain honourable men came to dine with him and the Brothers, in order to hear his discourse, desiring to enjoy familiar intercourse with him, and to be instructed by his good example and doctrine. These he treated kindly, exhorting them with wholesome counsel according to their station, and when they had heard the Word of God they returned severally to their own homes with thanksgiving.

(2) And when they had departed he briefly admonished the Brothers, saying, "It is a dangerous thing to speak and to associate with the Great

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

and them of the world. It is not expedient to flatter the rich, nor is it convenient that the inner secrets should be told to them; wherefore it is needful for a man to look carefully to what he saith to such, lest they be scandalized by any light word or unseemly action. For their eyes are ever looking upon us to consider our bearing, by reason of the good report which they hear of us. Let us stand therefore upon our guard, and set a good example to those from without who seek to visit us, for they see our outward actions only, and from these judge of what is within. Although we are not perfect in all things, let us take care that we give no ill example nor occasion of stumbling to the weak. These guests of ours are too kind to us, and perhaps their kindness is not to our profit. Let us not be over-pleased with empty praise, for it is our duty to be simple and lowly. It were better therefore to return quickly to our former dwelling, where there are many who take less thought of us, and some who even mock, and speak evil of us, a thing which is very profitable, and doth constrain us the more to turn again to God.

(3) And thus Florentius was guarded and thoughtful in all his speech, especially before them of the world and persons whom he knew not. Likewise he was strict in avoiding that most evil custom of swearing, which is common among men of the world; and he forbade any of his Community in their daily talk to use such phrases as "Verily I do swear," or "Of a surety I swear"; lest by such heedless swearing they should pile up sin on sin. Wherefore whenever he wished to lay stress upon any notable or important matter, or when he must bear testimony to anything, he

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

would not lightly or hardily introduce the form of an oath, but would answer in his gentle way, "This is the conclusion of the matter," or "this is surely so"; and thus he satisfied his questioner. Nor would he confidently affirm anything wherein he might be mistaken, but remembering the saying of the Lord, "Let your yea be yea and your nay, nay," he was careful to guard against any slip of the tongue, and to instruct others by his good example, and by telling the plain truth; wherefore men trusted his word without an oath rather than that of others whose tongues had the evil custom of much swearing.

CHAPTER XXVI

Of three temptations that are full of peril to the devout

(1)



MASTER FLORENTIUS being a most skilful and mighty champion in the Spiritual contest used to say that there were three temptations, perilous above all others, which hidden beneath the cloak of good motives do deceive many; and unless a man resist these in due time, that is at the very outset, they lead little by little to a final overthrow, or make the indolent wretchedly lukewarm. But this doth make the matter worse, that through the subtilty of the devil's wiles many are too heedless of such temptations, and scarce seek to be informed by men of prudence and knowledge as to the greatness of the perils into which they may fall.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

(2) The first temptation is when one, newly converted, doth desire to return to his own country and to visit parents and friends; for such an one a return to the world, on the pretext of doing good and in the hope of converting worldlings, is often the occasion of his neglecting his own soul, although he may think to gather fruit in his own country. And while he dallieth there amid vain and inconstant persons, he doth expose himself to the winds and waves of temptation. Experience hath often shown how one that is light-minded, and not yet firmly founded in virtue, when he doth join himself to them of the world without restraint, is either entangled by their sins, or, under stress of temptation, doth grow cold toward the good courses he had begun. Therefore is it good for a man continually to flee from everything that is hurtful to the soul, and not to return to his country or his friends unless some notable cause compel him. Let him never be presumptuous about himself, but be suspicious of this present world that is everywhere filled with poisoned snares; let him follow the counsel and sayings of his Superior, for this in every case is the safer and surer way. Of ten men who associate for long with their kindred or friends, scarce one or two return unhurt, and it doth often happen that they who remain in the world, having withdrawn from their good resolutions become even worse and more worthless than other men; and rejecting the Grace of God blush not to resume those evil courses which they did once despise.

(3) The second temptation is when one that is a layman, wishing to be a Clerk, doth through this desire leave his lowly station, and retire from

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

the holy Community in order that he may acquire learning and become great.

Wretched man! he knoweth not how evilly he is deceived when leaving his lowly station and obedience he seeketh higher place. Such an one is soon puffed up by a little knowledge and is slow to become a good Clerk. God grant that he become not altogether a worldling; that of his own motion and for the sake of worthless learning doth risk the loss of virtue and blacken the repute of a good name.

(4) The third temptation is when one that is already a Clerk and learned doth aspire to the Priesthood, to high preferment or to any other dignity, on the plea of some holy motive such as that of being the more able to be of profit to others, or of teaching better or of preaching more frequently. Although such an one may seem to have a good motive, yet inwardly he is weighed down by grievous pride in that he is in haste to go up higher so as to appear greater than his fellows. In that he loveth not lowly subjection and is unwilling to despise himself, he doth diligently beseech his friends that they recommend him for promotion, but heedeth not the danger of his own soul.

Alas! when he hath attained that little short-lived shadow of glory, gotten with a great effort, an effort indeed far greater than that which would suffice to deprive him of every honour, in how evil a case will he find his conscience.

(5) Let him who would be delivered from these three temptations pray God every day to save him from pride and vain conceit, and keep him in lowly subjection and perfect obedience; for pride doth make a man to be inwardly blind and without savour,

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

and outwardly a vain babbler, presumptuous, ignorant of himself and despising others; and, what is worse, to seek lordship over others is clearly enough a sign of perdition and leadeth to many evils. When a certain Brother was talking with Florentius in his cell the Master said, amongst other things: "Ye should study to give yourselves to lowliness, then may ye make progress and become worthy of the Grace of God."

CHAPTER XXVII

Of his sending forth the Brothers to gather fruit in divers places

(1)



FLORENTIUS, being most fervent in the love of Christ and one to whom to live was Christ and to die was gain, desired to bear fruit in his season; therefore he took care to be of profit to many, that they might attain the Kingdom of everlasting salvation, persuading them to despise this miserable world that passeth away. To this end he sent many persons to found several monasteries and new houses for the conversion of others. Some of these Brothers went to Windesheim, some to Mount St. Agnes, some to Northorn, some to Gelders, some to Holland; some became Priors of Monasteries, other Superiors of Communities, and Confessors to the Monks: and of these there are certain still alive who knew this most devout Master Florentius, the beloved of God, while he was yet living in the flesh, and can bear sure testimony as to his saintly life.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

(2) Likewise the Holy Orders of Carthusians, Cistercians, and Benedictines contain men not unknown to me who were worthy to see and hear both Florentius himself and his Brothers when they tarried in Deventer; these will bear witness that I speak the truth.

Also at the time when this notable priest of God shone as a light and flourished in Deventer, there were many other devout priests in the Diocese of Utrecht who instructed the faithful with holy discourse and knew how to bear strict rule over Communities whether of Brothers or of Nuns. All these submitted themselves humbly to Florentius with all due reverence, and gladly consulted that angelic man in difficult cases, preferring to trust his prudence and discernment rather than their own judgement. For they saw that in him above all other men the grace of Divine wisdom flourished pre-eminently, and though he lived in the midst of crowds yet, like a lily of the valley, bedewed with the water of wisdom, he kept the whiteness of his purity, and far and wide diffused the odour of his good reputation.

(3) At this time also there lived in the Diocese of Utrecht one Master Wermbold, a famous preacher and Confessor to the Nuns of St. Cecilia. He was an ardent lover of Holy Scripture and a great friend to the reverend Father Florentius; and the common people loved to hear and see him.

At Amersfoort there was Master William Henry, the Founder of that Community of Clerks who afterward became Canons Regular. In Zwolle there was Master Henry Goude, a notable preacher, a despiser of Mammon, and a humble Confessor to the Béguines; likewise Master Gerard Kalkar,

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

the Director of the devout Clerks, and an excellent instructor in virtue.

In Holland there flourished certain famous priests, learned in the Law of the Lord, and notable for their words and deeds, some of whom were fellow soldiers with Master Gerard Groote, and very dear to Florentius, and these gathered no small harvest for the Lord by converting men and edifying Communities of the Devout. In Haarlem there was Master Hugo, called the Goldsmith, and his priests; in Amsterdam Gisebert Dow, the founder of the two monasteries, and the renowned Director of many Nuns. In Medenblic Master Paul, who was altogether devoted to God and a man of probity. Master Gerard has made mention of these in his letters, and it was through them that the Devout Life first began and made progress in Holland.

(4) Moreover at Doesbruch in Gelders there was Master Derick Gruter, a laudable man and a Father to many Nuns; he was aforesaid a disciple of Gerard, and told me many good things of him. It were a lengthy task to mention by name each one of those devout Fathers who began to flourish in the time of Gerard and were contemporaries with Florentius; men who taught us to despise the vanities of the world, and to live humbly and continently, and left to them that followed after a bright example of holy conversation by their patience and obedience.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

CHAPTER XXVIII

Of his happy passing from this world and his burial in the Church

(1)



ESUS, out of his abundant kindness, doth stablish and redeem the faithful, and hath most surely promised them Eternal life and a full recompense, saying: "Everyone that hath forsaken father or mother or other earthly ties for my Name's Sake shall receive an hundredfold and shall possess life everlasting." He therefore saw fit as a reward to the holy Florentius His faithful servant—who was adorned with many virtues and had been proved by divers burdens and infirmities—to deliver him out of the prison house of this flesh, and to remove him to His own Kingdom in Heaven, whereat the Angels did rejoice.

(2) So when Florentius by his counsel and aid had founded as many devout Communities and Monasteries as he could and had instructed the lowly flock of his own house in the ordinances of peace and brotherly love according to Christ's good pleasure, and had carefully guarded them therein, he began inwardly to sigh and ardently to long to see the citizens of the heavenly country and the glory of Christ, toward Whom he had confidence in all things, and Whom he loved above all else.

Wherefore with true devotion he asked that the Body of the Lord should be administered to him, and gazing thereupon with faith unwavering, and adoring the same with the reverence that is due,

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

he said: "Oh! my Beloved Lord God, pardon me that I have so often touched and received Thee so unworthily." At these words many were pricked to the heart and wept, and one of the Canons who heard his words groaned deeply, saying: "Then what should I say, miserable sinner that I am, if a man so good doth feel and say such things about himself!"

But Florentius, having received the Very Body of God, and being fortified with the grace of Christ, gave himself up wholly to the good pleasure of God, and so long as he could speak he poured forth words of most wholesome comfort to his beloved Sons and Brothers.

(3) Amongst other things worthy to be remembered, he commended the unity of Brotherly Love, saying: "All who dwell in one house should be one in thought, should hold one purpose in the Lord, and should ever aim at conforming to one standard, without varying, in simple obedience to their superior. Wheresoever the Brothers do strive in fervency of spirit to be of one mind and to conform themselves in all things by the pattern of Christ's humility, there is peace, there is spiritual progress, there is a house well ordered. Abide in your lowly simplicity and Christ shall abide with you."

After this holy exhortation he set one of his priests over the whole Community, lest they, the Lord's flock, should remain without a director, and being set amid the waves of the world, should be as a ship that hath not a proper helm; therefore he set over them Amilius, a devout man, wise and learned, and one that was not backward in zeal for God and for the salvation of souls, bidding that each one of them should have recourse to him,

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

and obey him willingly. When he had quietly settled these and other matters he came to the last moment of this present life, for his bodily weakness was increasing.

(4) Now the most sacred Festival of the Annunciation was at hand, for this was the Vigil of that Feast, in honour of the glorious Mother of God, most Blessed Mary, ever Virgin! Most Holy Mother of Jesus Christ, whom Florentius the devout Vicar of her Son had ever loved with deep devotion. So, after the hour of Compline, when the customary Antiphon had been chanted in honour of Our Lady, and the Angelus had rung at the close of day he made an end of his life on earth while the Brothers round him prayed with sighs and tears. It was no marvel that they did so, for the might of their deep love constrained them to weep when their most beloved Father, the light and mirror of all the devout, the comforter of all that were troubled, was taken away from the light of temporal day, yet when they that loved him thought upon the sober and modest life of this most excellent priest, their pious faith did comfort them with the hope that glory in heaven should not be denied him, through Jesus Christ, Whom he had loved with all his heart, to Whom he had clung continually till the very instant of death, and served with the full devotion of faith.

(5) So Master Florentius, this Priest beloved of God and man, passed from this world in the fourteen hundredth year after the Incarnation of the Lord, during the reign of Pope Boniface IX, being forty-nine years old as I reckon, or but little more. He lived in good and holy conversation for nearly sixteen years after the death of the venerable Master Gerard, and during this time he gathered

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS


much fruit among the people of God, in Deventer and the whole Diocese of Utrecht. For his laudable life, let Christ Who adorned our time with a star of so bright a lustre, be praised and glorified for evermore.

On the day following the Canons and Clerks assembled, and the poor body, worn by long-continued chastisement, was carried by the Canons and Priests in procession to the Church of St. Lebuin and there interred with the rites proper to burial and all reverence, before that Altar in the Church which is dedicated in honour of St. Paul. The chosen Priest of God, as became a humble servant of Christ, had himself desired to be buried in the Cemetery with the Brothers who had died before him, and that no further honour should be paid him; but that Reverend Master Rambert, the Dean of Deventer, would by no means allow this, but determined rather, and that most rightly, that he should be buried with honour in a prominent place within that Church of which he had been a priest notable for virtue and adorned with learning.

CHAPTER XXIX

Of a vision which was seen after his death, and of the great glory which he attained.

(1)

 HERE was, in the city of Gorichem, a certain man named John Hermann, whose life was good and his reputation honourable, and his wife was called Jutta. These two did alike live after the commandments of God, and drew many others to

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

serve Him; they did often talk together of God upon holy days in their own house, and gladly showed hospitality to many Religious who came to visit them. Both of these were well known to Florentius, and learned from him the manner of holy conversation, and they set an example of life before their neighbours.

Now shortly after the death of Florentius, the aforesaid John did also depart from this world, and on a certain day, Jutta, who was most devout toward God, was occupied with prayer in her chamber. And having finished her devotion she arose to go forth from her chamber, and as she was opening the door she suddenly heard the window of the room open behind her.

(2) Looking back therefore she saw some one enter by the window who was clad round with a glory of light and most lovely to look upon, being in face like her husband, and she said, "Art thou there, John, my beloved husband?" and that other replied, "It is I, but call me no more thy husband"; and Jutta asked, "How is it with thee?" and he answered, "I am saved, and I enjoy the happiness of Heaven and the Presence of God." Then Jutta asked, "And how is it with our father, Lord Florentius?" and he answered, "Florentius hath a glory that is truly great; and all his works were found to be upright and good," and he added, "Remain thou in this house and change not thine abode, for thou shalt die ere long; and tell this to Adelaide the daughter of Thomas, the Superior of the Sisterhood," and then the Vision departed. After these things Jutta spent the rest of her days, though they were but few, with a heart so fervent toward God that all worldly things seemed to her but as worthless dung; and

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

it is manifest by this sign alone, that the aforesaid vision was no vain deceit, but an heavenly revelation sent by God.

(3) When one asked concerning the great glory of Florentius, it was answered to him, "It was chiefly because of three virtues. First, that great love which he had toward God, referring to Him as the Final cause of all the good things which he had, and in all things seeking His Honour and good pleasure. Secondly, that zeal for souls which he had toward his neighbours, in that he sought the salvation of all, and eagerly led them to God's service. Thirdly, because of his deep humility and contempt of himself, in that he always thought little and slightly of himself." These three things appear clearly and distinctly enough in his life, which is here written, and there are many of the faithful who are not ignorant thereof.



A LETTER AND
CERTAIN NOTABLE SAYINGS OF
FLORENTIUS

*A Letter from Florentius to one of the Canons
regular at Windesheim*

(1)

MY MOST BELOVED,



WHY dost thou trouble me thus? Are not mine own miseries enough for me? Yet overcome by weariness and yielding to thine importunity I am constrained to write to thee of matters that concern me not. Firstly, for all these necessities of thine I bid thee be thus importunate before God, in knocking continually at His door, and He shall straightway open to thee and give thee light far clearer than any man could give, although thou didst persist without ceasing in asking him questions, knocking at his door and making supplication to him, and he spent a whole lifetime in writing to thee.

Secondly, I urge thee above all things to submit thyself humbly to all men. It is expedient for thee to do this in thought, word and deed.

Continually remember, as the Blessed Bernard said to the Brothers on the Mount of God, that there is sunshine everywhere save in thy con-

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

science, and a clear sky everywhere save in thy heart.

This humility doth come by constant use and by considering thine own worthlessness in both body and soul, not by dwelling upon the faults of other men or making excuses for thyself. Above all things be careful when thou dost reprove another, not to exalt thyself. The Blessed Jerome commenting upon St. Mark, saith, "The blind man who was restored to light by the Lord saw men as trees walking." In like manner (saith he) a sinner should think that all men are higher than himself. So do thou look upon all the Brothers as being trees for loftiness compared with thyself. In thy work take upon thee the baser and menial tasks, and from time to time think upon thine own vileness, or else meditate of death, punishment, judgement, or any other thing that may abase thee or kindle thy love for God and thy neighbour. For the object of such meditation should be either to acquire this love, or to root out thy vices, or to attain virtue.

(2) Thirdly, as St. Bernard saith to the Brothers on the Mount of God, once daily compare to-day with yesterday, that thou mayest judge thy progress in virtue, or thy backsliding.

Learn to sit in judgement upon thyself once or twice every day, to set thy life in order, to regulate thy conduct, to accuse, condemn, or exact punishment from thyself. I counsel thee to keep to hand "The Mirror for Monks" or "The Mirror of Saint Bernard," that thou mayest order thy doings thereby. The contents of this book thou shouldest repeat because in whatsoever thou art engaged these will readily suggest how thou shouldest behave thyself, and that wherein thy

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

conduct hath been amiss. Likewise prevent all thy doings with meditation and brief prayer as to the manner in which thou shouldest act, and this will be easy to thee when by continued use thou canst repeat the contents of the book.

(3) Fourthly, early in the day and after the morning meal put before thine eyes thy evil habits, and the chiefest of thy vices, and also the virtues after which thou wouldest strive, and thus ever renew in thy heart the struggle with thy foes—the world, the flesh, and the devil; do this nothing doubting, for they that are with us are more than they that are against us. So wilt thou fulfil the precept of St. Bernard: “In the morning reckon with thyself for the night that is past, and take heed to thyself for the coming day how thou wouldest order thy conduct throughout its course.” The same also saith: “For every hour write down the exercises thou shouldest perform therein. Spiritual exercises for the hours of prayer, bodily exercises for the hours of labour, so that at Vespers when thou dost reckon up thy several deeds if thou dost find any duty ill done, as to the manner, or the place, or time in which it was done, it may not go unpunished or unpaid.”

Seek the common good and keep thy heart ever lifted up.

Pray for me, my Brother, for I have always been negligent in this, and fare thee well.

Before the morning meal meditate upon our Lord's Passion: afterward of death, judgement, and the pains of Hell: after supper think on thy vices and thy sins.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

Certain notable Sayings of Master Florentius the Priest

(1)

BEFORE all things know thy vices and thy passions.

Be watchful against temptation and the promptings of the passions. If thou dost feel these and instantly reject them they do not harm thee. If thou dost dally therewith it is evil; if in addition to such dalliance thou dost think with pleasure thereupon it is worse.

Reply humbly to them that ask of thee.

Avoid women, and beware of looking upon them. It is an ill example to the world to keep no guard over the eyes.

Tell thy sins with shame and sorrow, and a full intention to put them from thee, in the presence of God and thy confessor.

Tell thy faults one by one saying: "This have I done." Mark well in what thy fault doth lie, and tell this in simple words.

Thou oughtest not to speak evil of any, unless it can profit thee or him.

When thou dost accuse another be pitiful as to a weak Brother.

When thou doest nothing save that which accordeth with Holy Scripture, and understandest the same according to the interpretation of the Saints—not relying upon thine own interpretation—then is thy conscience good, and thy reason right.

It were good for a spiritually minded man to deal with his temporal concerns at an appointed

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

time, and afterwards to return to his spiritual duties forgetting all else.

(2) I think that the thoughts and promptings which come into our hearts are not under our own control,—but it is in our power to plant good in the heart by reading, prayer, and meditation until these promptings to what is unlawful are overcome and yield, and by the grace of God do cease.

The pride of some is such that they must always rule over others, or else altogether fall away and return to the world—for they know not how to put themselves on an equality with others, nor how to submit.

Oftentime the whole body is affected by the passions which do rule a man, though he know not the cause of his emotion. There was one that in the summer could not sleep, nor eat well, and at first he could not discover the cause thereof, but he afterward found that it was through melancholy. Thus do our passions conceal themselves within us.

The weak should not judge the acts of their Superiors; for such judgements are often wrong.

Keep nothing secret, whether it be a material thing or a thought, but reveal all.

Speak seldom with a man of the world, but when thou dost, direct him to that which is good, according to his condition.

(3) Avoid worldlings, great folks and revellers. If thou art about any lowly or menial work before other men, revile it not; to do so showeth pride, as if such work were not meet for thee.

Learn to understand thy prayers, and thus wandering thoughts shall be driven away.

Loud singing doth disturb the brain and the senses, and doth put out devotion.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

In praying thou oughtest to desire the grace and mercy of God rather than any great outward gifts—Mary thought herself unworthy of the salutation of the Angel, and being filled with the Holy Ghost went up into the hill country and ministered to Elizabeth. Any one that hath aught to say to a great king, would make to himself friends of them that are near to the king. So should one do in regard to Mary, who is in a special degree very near to God.

All things would become pleasant to one who should exercise himself well by meditating upon our Lord's Passion.

We ought to raise our heart to heaven without ceasing, and to return again and again to Holy Scripture, and to sigh that we are so carnal and sluggish in seeking the good that is eternal. By too great haste is devotion lost. Therefore avoid mere repetitions, and do all things with attention and thought, not from habit only.

(4) When thou art bidden to do something that is hurtful to the body remember that thy body is not thine own, but His to Whose obedience thou hast surrendered thyself.

In whatsoever degree a man hath given his goods, whether of the body or of the soul to the Community, in that same degree hath he part in the goods of the others.

Love equally in the Lord all who are converted; the absent alike with those that are present with thee. Avoid doing aught to which honour is attached, and aught of which thou mayest vainly boast, if it may be done equally well by another; and if anything may be so done by another or in some other place, love to have it so, and praise it more than if it were done by thee.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

Be not envious that another is holier than thou, or hath higher fame, but love the gifts of God in him and they shall be thine own.

Nothing doth quench the sins of the flesh so well as earnest study; get the habit of remaining in thy cell and reading thy book; compel thyself to do so until it doth become pleasant to thee, and to go out seemeth a hardship, to come in a delight. Flee to thy cell as to a friend, for thou art safe therein.

Whensoever a man talketh with his fellows, he ought to strive to impress lowliness upon them.

Worldly knowledge is very alluring; therefore let a man beware that he be not too much attracted thereto; let him earnestly desire to pass over to God by means of such knowledge, and not be satisfied therewith as an end in itself.

(5) The devout and venerable Father often said to his friends and Brothers: "How good it is for you, and how stably do ye stand in that ye are able to live under obedience!" If he had known this before, he would not, he said, for anything in the world have begun by ruling over others unless he had himself first lived under obedience—and unless it were that bodily weakness hindered him he would wish still to be under some strict Master who would altogether break down his will.

Also if he were under obedience he would never be perplexed, for every man ought to put the burden of his doubt upon the back of another: he ought to humble himself beneath all who are converted, even beneath the young, for he knoweth not how much grace God may have given to them.

No one can ever attain true humility unless he is despised by others and is not regarded in anything. It were better to be trodden under foot than to consent to the praise of others.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

When any of the Brothers doth ask counsel of thee, thou oughtest humbly to tell him the precepts thou hast read, for it is better always to follow the direction of others than thine own, unless thou seest that some better course is revealed to thee by the humility of thy questioner; but in such case never ascribe the revelation to thine own merits. If a man hath phantasies, then ought he to lift his voice in prayer.

(6) A man ought to direct all his exercises and studies to the conquest of his passions and weaknesses, for otherwise he doth profit little thereby.

In the hours of common labour stand ever on thy guard, and be careful of much speaking; think of that which thou hast read in thine hours of study.

There is no spiritual disease so great that it may not be cured by true obedience if a man hath wholly resigned himself he ought not to be more self-reliant, nor more despondent, than his Superior tells him to be. A man ought often, and day by day, to resign himself to God and his Superior; to bow the knees of his heart for pardon and to obey with his understanding. I am amazed that one who is under obedience can feel doubts in place of being content. When thou doest any good act be careful that thou do it wholly for God's sake, and that thou desire no other thing save His Honour and the edification of thy neighbour.

When thou art among the Brothers thou shouldst think: "Oh! that I might so behave that none should be offended through me!"

Thou shouldst seek the common good, for if thou dost begin by seeking thine own good in that which is least, thou wilt soon proceed to do so in greater things.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

(7) Whatever is for the common good, this ought we to strive to guard with care, as for instance, the Holy Vessels of the Altar. The books of Holy Scripture should be guarded as the truest treasures of the Church. In writing we ought not to seek to show our own skill only, as for instance by writing a good hand, but also the good of all—*e.g.*, that the books may be correct, well punctuated and clear, for one cannot study to advantage in bad or unfaithful copies.

Woe to him who living in a Community doth seek his own, or say that anything is his.

Woe to him who so living doth murmur about aught, or cause dissension in the Community: or trouble it in any manner.

(8) If we are one in will, in savour, and in custom in the Lord, then do we truly dwell together in unity.

Let every man study to conform himself to the Community in all his work and conduct; whether it be in reading, chanting, eating or fasting, let him not be singular. Nothing doth make a man so peaceful as the rule of never presuming to do anything of himself, but rather submitting altogether to the counsel of good men; and let a man always believe that it is more wholesome that such should consult for him.

Be earnest humbly to fulfil what is commanded thee, for if thou dost desire to question a command thou shalt hardly be truly obedient.

Seek devotion with all thy heart by diligent prayer. Wandering thoughts quench devotion as water quencheth fire.

Though thou art poor in virtue, and weak, thou oughtest not to be cast down thereby, but rather to humble thyself and think: "Since I have no

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

great gifts I will make the little that I have an offering to God, as Mary offered a pair of turtle doves and not a lamb. He is truly a Brother and friend who doth hate the vices of another and help him to overcome them.

Thou oughtest always to strive to occupy thyself with some good thing, and to pay no heed at all to phantasies.

(9) It is very dangerous to converse often or associate with men of the world who have authority and dignity, as Councillors, Priests, Canons, and other wealthy men. The reason is that since one is naturally in awe of them he doth often applaud them, and give assent to their words.

Beware of much speaking, specially before worldlings, for a man seldom speaketh much without afterward repenting of some rash word.

Likewise abstain from jesting and loud laughter, for whatsoever men see thee to be outwardly, such do they judge thee to be inwardly, though thou art not really so.

Much study is of little profit unless it be directed to the amending of one's life and to ordering oneself diligently in right conduct, for the Devil knoweth many things about the Scripture and yet is his knowledge of no profit to Him.

If one is slow and sluggish in spirit in the morning, yet should he not be despondent, for God is able to give him the grace of devotion at whatever time it may please him.

Preface thy labour with some short prayer.

(10) The servant of Christ ought to speak briefly and in a low tone, and to be careful not to speak when 'tis not needful. If necessity compel, let him go apart to some private place that is open to him, and consider whether it is expedient to speak.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

Thou oughtest always to strive to edify thy hearers by thy words, and to draw them nearer to the service of Christ: since nothing is more pleasing to God than labour for the conversion of souls.

Likewise we can do nothing more hurtful to Him/ than by making another to offend by our bad example, or loosing him from His service, for this is worse than to have crucified Christ in the flesh as did the Jews.

Before thou doest anything thou oughtest to strive for purity of heart, and to apply thyself to pious meditation, because from this doth spring Charity, prayer and devotion; and all the other virtues are strengthened thereby.

Never be idle, but be busied with some occupation, especially some holy one, directing all thy motives and thy work to the service of God.

(11) A portion of the Spirit is better than much knowledge without devotion: for to acquire the trick of beautiful language is easy, but to find the way to good works is hard.

Whatever a man may have done, let him know that he hath gained nothing if he doth not feel himself to be made thereby the humbler; when thou doest aught that is good, do it in simplicity and purity of mind to the honour of God, and seek not to advantage thyself in any way.

From heedlessness in word come troubles, offences, and slanders. Look therefore to what thou doest, why thou doest it, and in what manner.

That by which God is angered and thy neighbour offended is no slight matter.

Before thou dost begin any work, set before thee how thou wouldest behave thyself therein, and do not lightly break this rule.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

Hasten to thy cell and thou shalt recover the devotion thou hast lost.

(12) When two or three converse together let each one see to it that their talking go not forward to what is profitless, but if this should happen thou oughtest to say charitably and humbly, but without shamefacedness, "Brother, it is not expedient for us to talk any more; let us go to our cell and do something better." The servant should strive, so far as in him lies, to turn his heart away from the creature and from all earthly longings; the more one doth progress in this, the more doth the desire for the love of God increase.

(13) If any would make good progress, let him study to do violence to himself, that is, let him strive to overcome his vices; for example, if he formerly desired lofty things he should now seek lowliness; and so forth in the case of other vices.

One that is truly obedient ought never to think slightingly of a command, even though it may seem a small matter. When the Devil seeth us lowly and one in heart, then verily doth he flee from us, because he is the father of pride, and of discord.

We ought not to pay heed to our neighbour for his beauty or his wealth, but for that he is redeemed by the Blood of Christ.

The servant of God should strive to keep peace and concord with the Brothers; for this do the angels love more than aught else and this do they more gladly see in us, namely, that we are each and all peacemakers and one in heart.

(14) The servant of Christ should never feel safe, whatever good he may do, but be ever fearful about himself, lest perchance he may be found a reprobate before our Lord Jesus.

THE LIFE OF FLORENTIUS

Before all things he should strive to think all other men holier and better than himself.

Devotion is nothing else than the desire of the soul toward God.

If a man earnestly endeavour to act humbly, however little he may follow our custom, yet shall it be counted to him for obedience. But if he neglect this and care not for it I fear that he shall be punished severely.

(15) One that doth desire to make progress in humility must often set before him hard and menial tasks, chide himself, judge and condemn, and in his secret thoughts ponder over his own worthlessness so as to be able patiently to bear contempt when humiliations come upon him.

When thou dost feel envy, or suspicion, or vain-glory arising in thy heart, reply inwardly thereto and say: "Fie upon thee that thou art still so wretched and weak and that thou dost go forward less than other men, and dost become continually worse."

Thus humble and confound thyself inwardly and the temptations of the Devil shall flee from thee, for it is he that doth inspire these evil passions. We ought to expend great labour in striving against carnal things if we wish to conquer them.

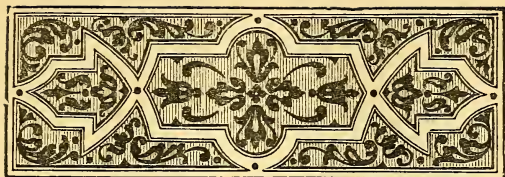
We seldom or never eat but the Devil lieth in wait for us.

Wherefore let us ever watch and pray, because the Adversary never sleepeth, but doth assault us on every side.



LIVES OF THE FOLLOWERS OF FATHER
FLORENTIUS





LIVES OF THE FOLLOWERS OF FATHER FLORENTIUS

PREFACE

The Elder Brother



ENABLED by the gift of God I have now in my account of these venerable fathers and illustrious men Master Gerard and Father Florentius described certain of their virtuous deeds, using that unpolished style to which the poverty of my genius doth compel me. It remaineth in the next place to set down as they come into my mind such memorials of their followers as may avail to instruct in humility the lives and characters of simple brethren.

These men followed Christ by the narrow way that leadeth unto life, manfully treading under foot the pomp of the world, and the softness of the flesh, so that they are not unworthy to be compared to the luminaries of heaven, for by their virtues they enlightened a vast multitude of faithful people whom they unceasingly exhorted to

PREFACE

good deeds during their lifetime. Wherefore one may not keep silence as to their godly conversation in Christ, but must set forth their deeds, which are worthy of veneration, for the instruction of the little ones.

Novice

I earnestly entreat thee that in speaking of men so notable thou show me at least some few sparks of their devotion that I may be enkindled thereby to the love of virtue, seeing that I may set before me a new standard of life when I hear of the conduct of men of our own time. For many poets have written of the deeds of the heathen so as to profit their readers in this manner, and how much more oughtest thou for the consolation of the devout to set forth the example of these servants of God who have triumphed over the world, so that the good may go forward continually to better things, and the sluggish be roused the more quickly from the slothfulness of the body.

The Elder Brother

If thou deignest to hear me I will tell thee somewhat that shall edify thee not a little at this present time. I will set before thee the lives of men who had not only the reputation of virtue but in addition to that reputation led lives illustrious by virtuous deeds. Yet now (fie upon it) there are some who having deserted their first enthusiasm, love to wander abroad, delight in vain talking, prefer their own wisdom to the primitive institutions of our Fathers, and to justify the satisfaction of their own desires, employ cunning arguments in place of obeying the Holy Law. Do thou above all things avoid this foolish presump-

PREFACE

tion and follow the humble character and habit of those approved fathers who in our time were illustrious in Deventer under the rule of our reverend Father Florentius.

May grace be given me to set forth those things which tend to edification, that this present discourse may so instruct simple and humble brethren that all those who desire to follow Christ in the Devout Life may entirely lay aside care for this world, and study in the fervour of their devotion and their obedience to the law of holy simplicity to exhibit that same zeal which these devout and virtuous men exhibited in their earnest preaching.



LIFE OF JOHN GRONDE

CHAPTER I

*Of the first Congregation of Clerks in
Deventer*

(1)



THE righteousness of good men, as reason doth dictate, everywhere deserveth due praise. For those who lived lives worthy of praise ought not after their death to be given over to forgetfulness. The deeds of such should be held in remembrance if only for the consolation of them that survive; and should be set up as a pattern to other faithful people. Wherefore it behoves us above all to commend those who studied to serve God in humility and devotion in the House of our reverend Father Florentius from the time of the foundation of that House, and remained with all constancy under the rule of holy obedience with great fervency of Spirit unto their lives' end. Yet I do not purpose to write of the virtues of all of them, a thing which is by no means possible, but as concerning several

JOHN GRONDE

of them I desire to record a few things that are within mine own knowledge.

(2) When I had come to study in Deventer, in the days of my youth, I sought the way to the Regulars at Windesheim, and having found there the Canons Regular, amongst whom was my brother, I was led by his advice to approach that most reverend man Master Florentius, who was Vicar of the Church of Deventer, a devout priest, whose most excellent fame had already reached the Upper Provinces, and had drawn my mind to love him: for a great multitude of scholars used to praise him for his conduct of holy things. Both his appearance and his words confirmed his righteous reputation, and he was in favour in the sight of all men, for indeed he was a true worshipper of God and most devoted in his reverence for our Holy Mother the Church.

When I came into the presence of the reverend Father he kept me for a while with him in his house, being moved thereto by fatherly affection; and he placed me in the School, and besides this gave me the books which he thought I needed. Afterwards he obtained for me a lodging, at no cost to myself, with a certain honourable and devout matron, who often showed kindness to me and many other Clerks. So being associated with this man who was so holy, and with the Brothers of his Order, I had their devout lives daily in my mind and before my eyes, and I took pleasure and delight in the contemplation of their godly conduct, and in the gracious words which proceeded from the mouths of these humble men. Never before could I recollect to have seen such men, so devout and fervent were they in the love of God and of their neighbour. Living in the world they had no

JOHN GRONDE

part in the life thereof, and seemed to take no heed to worldly business. Remaining at home they laboured carefully in copying books, being instant continually in sacred study and devout meditation. In the hours of labour they had recourse to ejaculatory prayer for their consolation; in the morning, having said Matins, they went to the Church, and during the Celebration of Mass they poured forth as an offering to God the first fruits of their mouth and the aspirations of their heart, and prostrating the body lifted up their pure hands and the eyes of their soul to Heaven, seeking by prayer and lamentation to reconcile God to them through the Saving Host.

(3) The first founder and the Spiritual ruler of this notable Community was Master Florentius, who was adorned with virtue and filled with Divine wisdom and understanding in his knowledge of Christ, because he, with his priests and clerks, humbly imitated the manner of the Apostolic life. These men, therefore, having one heart and mind in God brought every man what was his own into the common stock, and receiving simple food and clothing avoided taking thought for the morrow. Of their own will they devoted themselves to God and all busied themselves in obeying their Rector or his Vicar, and holding holy obedience as the highest rule, strove with all their strength to conquer self, to resist the passions, and to break down their own will, and besides this they sought earnestly to be gravely admonished for any acts of omission and neglect. For this reason there was in them much grace and true devotion: and they edified many by their words and example; likewise, by patiently abiding the mockery of the world, they led many to despise the same,

JOHN GRONDE

and those who had formerly contemned them and considered their life—which was without honour—as a folly, afterward being converted to God, and having experienced the grace of devotion, were compelled by their consciences to confess openly that these men were truly servants and friends of God.

(4) Many persons therefore, both men and women, despising worldly felicity, were converted to the Lord, and were instant to keep His commandments and to practise acts of mercy to the poor with Christian devotion, relying upon the counsels of the beloved Father Florentius. All the Brothers of his Order helped him, holding fast to the Word of Life, for they, like the luminaries of Heaven, gave light to a world growing old, dwelling in the midst of the turmoil thereof. Some who were priests and were learned in their knowledge of the Divine Law, preached earnestly in the Church, and by their preaching faithful people were wholesomely instructed to the practice of pious deeds and the hearing of holy discourses.

CHAPTER II

Concerning John Gronde



HERE was in those days at Deventer a devout priest, named John de Gronde, who was born in Octmesheim in Twent. This man, well known by repute, eloquent as a preacher and pre-eminent amongst the Clergy by reason of his character for chastity, was quietly content to serve the Altar as a simple Priest.

JOHN GRONDE

For a time he thus lived in the Province of Holland, but then the venerable Master Gerard Groote procured that he should be sent to help him, writing as follows to the priests who were then earnestly serving the Lord in Amsterdam, for he was joined to them by a special bond of love: "Be it known to you," said he, "that the township of Deventer standeth in urgent need of a good priest to assist the Religious by hearing confessions, for we have none such for our need. Wherefore, I pray you if there be no serious hindrance to the Holy Church in Amsterdam that our beloved John Gronde may be transferred to us from you, for doubtless he will be profitable to us; moreover his position here will be most suitable to him, since it was for this purpose only that he was ordained, namely, to succour those that are truly converted to the Lord, for this is the holiest of all tasks, and we shall receive him most joyfully and gladly."

(2) He came, therefore, to Deventer to Master Gerard, and being kindly received by him he lived a humble and devout life with the Community, dwelling in the ancient House of Florentius with the Brothers who first formed that holy Congregation; and being fervent in spirit it was his wont to rouse the Brothers to prayer very early in the morning, saying, "Arise, watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." He remained in the same house until the death of Master Gerard, after whose happy departure he went to the House of the Sisters, and dwelt in Gerard's cell. His solemn voice was often heard preaching the Word of God in the Church at Deventer, and Florentius was sometimes present, reverently hearing his preaching, listening intently and earnestly to the

JOHN GRONDE

sweet and divine discourse which proceeded from his mouth, for his voice was sonorous, penetrating the ears of men and piercing their hearts.

(3) Sometimes also he went to Zwolle to comfort the devout Brothers and Sisters. During one season of Lent he often preached there, and once on Good Friday he expounded our Lord's Passion in a most earnest manner for above six hours, allowing a short interval in the middle of his sermon to restore the strength of his hearers. When of his brotherly love for them he sojourned at Zwolle, he heard confessions from some of the devout, giving wholesome remedies to the penitents, and persuading them to abide by their holy resolution, for many were found in that place who were eager to serve God, and happily their number has been increased until our own time. So anxiously was this devout preacher sought after, and so gladly was he heard, that even when he was in the Guest Chamber and was sitting at meat he would not deny the Word of Salvation to those who sought him, but while he was refreshing the body he also administered to them that were heartily contrite medicine to heal their souls of those sins which they had confessed to him. In so doing indeed he followed the example of Christ, who as He sat at meat graciously accepted the penitence of the most blessed Mary Magdalene; and when Simon thought wrongfully of the penitent confuted him, and directed him aright, giving a wise reason for the pious deed which she had done for Him.

(4) Also he went at times to the Brothers at Mount St. Agnes to hear their confessions, for they were at this time poor and had no priest, and he said to them: "Let it not seem to you a hard

JOHN GRONDE

thing to follow a God of humility, for by a little toil ye may gain His Kingdom.”

After this he hastened to return to the place of his habitation, being unwilling to be separated for long from the beloved Brothers of Florentius, for it was his only joy to live with them and they loved him with all their hearts. In garb he was simple and in diet temperate, he flattered not worldlings for gain's sake, but as a true preacher of the Gospel sought an usury of souls and to promote an increase of spiritual progress in these devout communities. Therefore, inasmuch as he was a faithful minister of the Lord and the day was at hand when he should be called to receive an everlasting recompense for his labours, he began to be grievously smitten with sickness.

(5) Thinking he should not live long he had himself carried to the House of Florentius desiring to make an end of his days in the midst of his Brethren; for he trusted that by their prayers and merits he would be greatly holpen at his last hour and faithfully defended from the snares of the enemy. And by the mercy of God so it came about, for the Most High had compassion upon him, so that he was comforted by the presence of Florentius and his Brethren, and at the bidding of the beloved Father made an end of his last words by saying: “In the Name of the Lord”; and thus he committed to Him the issue of his strife and breathed forth the breath of his life early in the morning about the fourth hour on the day after the Feast of St. John before the Latin gate, namely the 7th of May in the year of the Lord 1392. He was buried in the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the side of Master Gerard and in the same grave, where they both alike repose in

THE LIFE OF

peace. This was fitting, that as they had loved one another in life, so in death they should not be divided, but should be buried in the same Church, and beneath the same memorial stone, awaiting the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to be raised up again by Him.

LIFE OF JOHN BRINCKERINCK



O this wrestler in the cause of God there succeeded John Brinckerinck, a native of Zutphen, and formerly a loved disciple of Master Gerard. When the latter came and preached in divers places Brinckerinck often went with him and was his comrade upon the way, just as Luke accompanied Paul.

By this means he heard from Gerard many excellent things and learned of him, becoming a devout imitator of his deeds and a credible witness of his sanctity; for he came in and went forth with him, recited the Hours, and was careful in ministering to him in other pious acts of service. After Gerard's happy death, he lived humbly and devoutly under obedience to the reverend Father Florentius, being most zealous in striving to follow those good principles which he had imbibed with a thirsty heart from the preaching of Master Gerard. But by God's ordinance he was promoted to the Priesthood, and remained in the Community with the Brothers, labouring much in the establishment of the first House which Florentius founded until at last when John Gronde had died he was placed in charge of the Sisterhood. Being a man of power and a zealous lover of Chastity,

JOHN BRINCKERINCK

he ruled the House that was committed to him with all strictness, not sparing himself toil, but often wearying himself beyond his strength in his efforts to gain souls. Sometimes he preached the Word of God in the Church, sternly reproving sin, and commending virtue in most excellent wise, as was seemly.

(2) Twice did I hear him preach upon our Lord's Passion on Good Friday, effectually enough and at some length. His first text was "God spared not His own Son," the second he took from the Psalm, "What shall I give unto the Lord for all the benefits that He hath bestowed upon me"!

The Devout heard him gladly, but some worldly men murmured against him because he took occasion to denounce their vices; yet he was not made fearful by reason of such men, for he loved to speak truth and to strive for justice, choosing rather to obey God and to be of profit to the good rather than to consent to evil men. Once, therefore, on the Feast of the Circumcision he preached very eloquently and persuasively upon the Name of Jesus, exalting that sweet and blessed Name above all names that are in Heaven and Earth.

(3) At length his discourse proceeded to denounce certain worldly and foolish men on the ground that some, alas! named that Holy and Inviolable Name with too little reverence and often even in jest, and he cried, saying, "There are some who hearing this Sweet and Blessed Name Jesus say jestingly and in mockery, "Aye, Jesus is the God of the Béguines." "Oh! wretched men and fools, what do ye say? Who then is your God? Are ye worshippers of the devil that ye call Jesus the God of the Béguines? To you this is a

THE LIFE OF

great stumbling-block; but to them their great honour and their chief joy is this Holy Name of Jesus, Which they call upon continually and reverence deeply; and before all and above all the names of Saints they love and adore Jesus the Son of God, Whom ye mock and despise because these Brethren and Béguines rejoice to call upon His Name, devoutly praise It, saluting one another therein. Woe unto you! for that ye have the devil's name upon your lips more often than that of Jesus because He seemeth to you to be too humble and despised!" In so saying he made them that loved Jesus to rejoice, and confounded them that mocked Him as they deserved.

(4) But when the number of the handmaids of God began to be increased, John, putting his trust in the help of the Most High, built a larger house for them to dwell in, that he might save more souls of them who fled to Christ from the turmoil of the world. At length by great labour he built a large convent for Devout women outside the city towards the north, in which he received certain Sisters from Gerard's house, and caused them to be imbued with holy learning, and to be invested in the habit of Regulars under perpetual vows. These Sisters, and also those who remained in the city, he ruled strictly for the remaining twenty-six years of his life, the Lord helping him, but some he sent to other places to found new communities. In the beginning he found only sixteen Sisters living in the community, but at his death he left 150—for God multiplied their numbers in his days.

(5) The words which he spoke to a familiar friend bear witness that he thought humbly and fearfully of himself, though he wrought so good

JOHN BRINCKERINCK

a work. While they were on the way together and were speaking of the future life, he said, "See, Brother, if the Angel of the Lord came to me now and said, 'Bow thy neck, John, and suffer thy head to be cut off and thou shalt be in purgatory,' I would gladly submit that I might be assured of Salvation and thus be enabled to die in a state of Grace." At another time he said in his preaching: "How great and exalted is the priestly office, whose dignity scarce any mortal man can worthily support! If I could put off the garb of my priesthood as readily as I put it on I would straightway unfrock myself here. Let those who make a boast of their Holy Orders and pride themselves thereupon, not considering the obligations which they incur, give heed to these things and learn to think humbly of themselves, and to abase their hearts in the fear of God; for every man will be safer before God in the time to come in proportion as he is now the humbler in himself."

(6) This servant of God underwent many labours in his lifetime, and suffered scorn and reproach from the envious, but by patience he overcame them all, and giving the Glory to God he faithfully finished the good work he had begun. The more humbly he thought of himself the more pleasing was he to God and the more souls did he draw with him to the life of chastity, and so when he had laboured long enough and had produced much fruit in the vineyard of the Lord, which God's Right Hand had planted, the day grew on to eventide when he should receive the reward of his labours and cease from all earthly work, according to the Word of the Lord Who said, "Call the labourers and give them their hire"; for lo! he fell sick, being seized by a great

THE LIFE OF

and violent fever, and thinking that he was about to depart he sent word to the Prior of Windeheim that he was grievously sick and that the end of his days was at hand. And when the Prior came he explained his earnest wishes, committing the care of the Sisters to him as unto a faithful steward, that he might provide for them in the matter of a suitable Rector, lest their new-born zeal for obedience might perish through neglect or disuse.

(7) So the Festival of our Lord's Annunciation dawned and passed, and on the next day, *i.e.*, March 26th, John, that faithful servant of Christ, panting for a heavenly country, gave up his soul to the God Whom from his youth he had striven to serve with the whole strength of his body. He died in the year of the Lord 1419, when that reverend Lord Frederick de Blanckenheim ruled over the diocese of Utrecht, a noble bishop and a pious and renowned patron of all devout persons. He was buried in the convent of the Sisters of the Order of Regulars at Diepenheim in the middle of the choir before the High Altar which he had himself built and consecrated to the honour of the Blessed Virgin and St. Agnes.

Novice

I gratefully receive what thou sayest; happy is Deventer that she hath been adorned by such priests; but I pray thee pursue the way which thou hast now begun, and hide not from me those things which I have not yet heard.

The Elder Brother

The fervency of thy petition doth compel me to narrate certain other things which are unknown to

JOHN BRINCKERINCK

thee. Yet how can a mind that is weighed down of its own evil tell anything in worthy wise about the virtues of men made perfect? But since for love's sake I have begun this task hear also what followeth. I will tell my story briefly, lest a lengthy discourse cause the reader weariness. Seek not any adornment of style in my words, but rather edification of character drawn from the lowly conversation of these Devout Brethren.

LIFE OF LUBERT BERNER

Concerning Lubert Berner

(1)



AMONGST those who in earlier days gave light to the devout in Deventer there shone one Lubert the son of John Berner, a native of Zwolle. He was a priest whose character was truly humble and entirely obedient; that his life was earnest in Christ is known to me and to divers of the Brethren of Windesheim, Mount St. Agnes, and the Fountain of the Blessed Virgin near Arnheim, of whom many survive unto this present, but some are fallen asleep in the Lord.

What can I, poor creature that I am, say of so great a man as to whose life such a multitude of the devout bear witness? Nay, even men of the world, magistrates and councillors, as well as those who at that time were canons and vicars at Deventer knew him for a man of great virtue; that he was so may be proved by his many acts of humility, some of which I will bring forward

THE LIFE OF

here as examples, and as it were sweet smelling branches sprung from a good tree.

(2) When this Lubert was in the flower of his youth, and had learned the rudiments of the art of grammar, he went with some companions of his own age to the University of Prague, and soon having taken his Bachelor's degree returned to Zwolle, where his friends received him with great joy. Not long afterwards, attracted by the kindness of the Devout Brothers, his heart was softened by the inspiration of God to the amending of his life, and resolving to be the servant of Christ he retired from the world (but secretly, because his parents and friends were opposed to his design) and gladly exchanged worldly pursuits for spiritual warfare. He came to Deventer to Florentius, who was then in the full vigour of his holy life, and being received with fatherly love he learned wholly to renounce the pomps and cares of the world and to imitate the lowly life of Christ. He submitted himself beneath the yoke of obedience with the fervour of his whole heart, and was zealous in taking hold upon the discipline of the new life, and offering himself daily as a living sacrifice to God he quickly rose to the highest perfection by breaking down his own will.

(3) But Berner, his father, who was a powerful Councillor at Zwolle, took it ill that his son had become a follower of Florentius, and turned to so lowly a condition of life, so he sent several messengers to dissuade Lubert from his holy purpose, thinking that he was utterly astray in thus foolishly relinquishing his parents and worldly wealth. But Lubert being constant in mind stood unmoved, choosing rather to follow the counsel of Christ than to do the will of his earthly father, for God

LUBERT BERNER

is greater than man, and hath bidden us to love Him above all things, saying: "He that loveth Father or Mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." Meanwhile it happened that his father fell sick, and his weakness was very heavy on him so that he could not even speak. Therefore Lubert was bidden to come quickly if he desired to see him alive; for through God's mercy the father in his utmost need was to receive the counsel of salvation through his son. So he went in haste to his father's house, to further the salvation of his soul, being filled with filial sympathy for his sickness and remembering the commandment of the Lord rather than the injury which had been done formerly to himself.

(4) So he who had lately fled before his father's persecution now visited him safely when he was sick, and spoke gently to him whose opposition he had lately endured; but the father, looking upon his beloved son, was greatly rejoiced at the sight of him, and wonderful to say, though he had been dumb and unable to open his mouth, he now for joy began to speak.

Forthwith he sought pardon from Lubert and begged him of his mercy to forgive him for that he had once sought to hinder him from walking in the way of God. And Lubert overflowing with love gladly forgave him all. So the father being reconciled unto his son now followed more wholesome counsels, and not wishing Lubert to be defrauded of his patrimony, ordered all those things to be given him which fell to him by the right of succession. These things he set in order during his lifetime that after his death he might find mercy from God and be effectually assisted by his son's prayers. A few days afterwards he died, and

THE LIFE OF

Lubert, remembering his kindness, poured forth fervent prayers with many tears for him, and he did not take the portion which fell to him to be expended upon his own desires but delivered it all into the hands of Florentius to be spent in the pious service of the Brotherhood.

Florentius did not keep the goods entrusted to him for his own use but laid them out in the building of the House and in paying the expenses thereof. This is that Monastery of Florentius, which is distinguished by being called after his name and by the favour of the Councillors of the State was founded for a Community of Religious Clerks in the year 1391.

(5) In the same year Lubert and his friend Henry Brune, who was a devout man, were ordained to the priesthood. These two were as twin brethren, having been nurtured in that House with the milk of holy devotion, and being adorned alike with great virtues were thought worthy of the honour of the Priesthood. Both were men who were well born as the world judgeth, and as God judgeth pre-eminent for their devotion, humble, sober, chaste, kindly, earnest, zealous, loving, docile, simple, and obedient.

(6) Now with regard to Lubert when he had become a priest, I will endeavour to describe certain acts of his to serve for examples, and these I myself witnessed and have often heard of from the Brothers. Once he was sitting in his cell and writing when Florentius sent to summon him, and as soon as Lubert received the message he laid down his pen and rose from his seat. Now he had reached the last line of the page and there were perhaps three or four words remaining to be written; so the Brother who was sent with the

LUBERT BERNER

message said to him: "Write that last line and then the page will be finished—thou hast time to do so before thou goest." But Lubert in the true spirit of obedience, replied: "I must write no more, but obey instantly." Verily he was another Mark, and worthy to be rewarded with him of whom it is written in the lives of the Fathers that when summoned by his Abbot he would not even finish a letter which he had begun. When his business with Florentius was done Lubert returned to finish his work filled with the joy of a good conscience as the fruit of his obedience. Then the other Brother told in order all that had happened to Florentius, who hearing of the prompt obedience of Lubert, praised him thus, saying: "Lubert, Lubert, how well thou knowest what is for thy profit and thy spiritual progress." So diligent was he in writing that when anyone spoke to him he continued his task while making a fitting reply.

(7) At another time a scholar who wished to write a letter to his parents was doing so by Lubert's advice in his cell, and I was present with them. Then Florentius came in and said: "What do ye?" and Lubert answered with respect, "My companion is writing a letter to his parents," to which that most kindly Father replied: "Write on, that thy name may be written down for Life Eternal." The young man aforesaid afterward became a devout Religious. Neither do I forget the words of my Father Florentius which he spoke in Lubert's cell, for a good man out of the good treasure of his heart ever bringeth forth good things. Florentius was instant to speak that which should tend to edification, and Lubert his disciple strove not to neglect aught which might fall from

THE LIFE OF

his master's mouth, but to fulfil his commands without hesitation.

(8) One of the Devout asked leave of Florentius to visit his friends and relations, and as his request was urgent Florentius gave him permission, not wishing to make him sad. When he returned from his journey, having met with many perils on the way, he came to Lubert, the servant of Christ, and said: "I wonder that Father Florentius so readily gave me leave to revisit mine own country, since so many dangers meet a man in the world," and Lubert answered: "If Father Florentius had known that thou wert strong enough and able to submit thy whole will to his good pleasure he would have spoken otherwise to thee. But he condescended to thy petition and desire from love of thee, lest of thine own motion thou shouldst venture upon something even worse. The blame therefore resteth with thee and not with him for his consent." Then that other replied: "It is good for me to know this, and for the future I will look to it more carefully that I do what I am told, following the counsel of him that hath the governance of me;" for he acts foolishly who doth follow his own desires against the good pleasure of his superior, as is shown in this instance, and the experience of many doth bear a like testimony.

Novice

(9) I gladly hear of these patterns of holy obedience; God grant that being taught by this example I may for the future beware of being satisfied with mine own judgement, and may always incline myself to obey my Superior. But besides these things I would hear somewhat of the humility of this devout man, for if he had

LUBERT BERNER

not been humble he would not have obeyed so quickly.

The Elder Brother

(10) It is fitting that I should tell thee somewhat of this matter, for to consent to one who for a pious purpose doth make such a request, doth tend to edification and doth gain favour in no small measure with the Almighty.

This Lubert of happy memory was indeed humble, humble in heart, in garb, in deed, and in word, as the following instances shall show. He was wont to praise the virtues of others somewhat highly, to think himself of less account than any, and to speak with the poor and simple rather than with the rich. Wherefore when a certain Clerk came and asked him to give him some good counsel for the amending of his life, Lubert replied: "Good Brother, what can I, a slothful and profitless man, say to thee! Go to that Brother yonder, and he shall instruct thee better. For I am like a vessel made to dishonour which may never be washed clean, but must ever send forth a foul savour."

The Brother hearing this went away much edified and said to his companions: "How humble a man is Lubert!"

(11) There were two Clerks talking to one another of Lubert, and one of them said: "I think that he weareth too austere an aspect; gladly would I speak to him sometimes but I dare not;" to which the other answered: "If it seem good to thee I will tell him of it and perchance he may amend himself." The Clerk therefore came to Lubert, and said: "I would fain have some talk with thee," and Lubert said, "Say on." Then that

THE LIFE OF

other said to him: "Some are offended in thee because thou dost walk with such austerity, and dost look sourly upon them, wherefore they dare not to approach thee and speak with thee. I pray thee be more complaisant and kindly affectionate in thy manner of speech that they may come freely to thee." Then the humble Lubert answered: "Most gladly will I amend myself through the Grace of God, and I thank thee that thou hast admonished me." From that hour he was as it were another man, and he looked more cheerfully upon those who approached him, though he maintained a due and proper gravity.

(12) Once when the Brothers were gathered together, Florentius questioned them concerning a certain matter in the Holy Scriptures, and as the others were silent, Lubert, because he was the eldest amongst them, began to speak. But Florentius, who wished to humble him before them and to prove his spirit, said, with a grave air: "Thinkest thou that we are ignorant of what thou sayest we who are Bachelors and Masters in Arts?" and Lubert humbly replied: "I was presumptuous;" for this was his wont when he was reprov'd for any small fault, that he did not excuse himself, but rather confessed himself to be blameworthy, saying; "I was in fault," or "negligent," or "careless," or "foolish," or "stupid," or "idle," or something of the like nature; confessions which proclaimed his own humility and edified the Brothers.

(13) When he read aloud during meal time he would make mistakes of set purpose that he might be corrected by the Brother whose duty it was to do so, and sometimes he pretended not to have heard that he might be corrected yet more fully,

LUBERT BERNER

for he desired to be put to confusion and to be held a dullard for not being able to read better. But Gerard of Zutphen, whose duty it was to correct such errors at meal-time, perceiving that his mistakes arose not through ignorance only but through his virtue of humility, abstained from correcting him a second time. He had a manly voice as of a trumpet, and read in very seemly wise.

(14) One of the Brothers asked Florentius this question: "Why dost thou not reprove me and chasten me as thou dost Lubert and John Ketel our cook? Would it not be good for me that thou shouldst sometimes so chasten and reproach me?" But the good Father, filled with the virtue of sound judgement, answered: "If I knew that thou wert as strong for all good as they I would prove thee in like manner: but these two are of such a character that through reproof they go forward yet further and do not murmur against it, but become thereby yet more humble and fervent in spirit. For they rejoice in being despised and in bearing blame beyond all others." The beloved Father would often reproach them to their faces before the other Brothers, for although he admonished them severely so as to set an example to the rest, yet he deeply loved them, as he showed particularly by the many tears he shed at the time of their death.

(15) So to this Lubert as a good and wise man, virtue was truly of a pleasant savour, and the passions and concupiscence of the flesh were things to shudder at, for he strove to overcome the forwardness of his nature, and in like manner he stirred up others to fight manfully against their sins.

THE LIFE OF

(16) Once when he was speaking devoutly and earnestly with certain of the Brothers about conquering the passions, they communed together almost until the middle of the night. Their hearts were so kindled with the love of God and the desire to amend their lives that they forgot themselves and did not perceive the mist of sleep but put away heaviness from them, being aroused to new devotion by their ardent conversation about the Word of God; for they proved by their own experience the truth of that verse of the Psalmist: "Thy word doth burn vehemently and thy servant loveth it."

By thus communing together of holy things, Lubert and those who were summoned with him to advance in the Spiritual Life were greatly inflamed, so that afterward he would say joyfully and longingly repeat to the Brothers who were his comrades in arms: "When! oh! when can we set ourselves aflame once more!"

Novice

(17) By telling me this thou dost excite my admiration. Would that I could hear continually of such matters which should pierce my heart to my healing, and enkindle me. Would that no vain talking might interpose to defile my conscience! But I pray set forth some other examples from the life of this noble priest to teach me to avoid scurrilous talk, for I confess that it is no small joy to hear of their devout communing.

The Elder Brother

(18) Our Saviour Jesus Christ saith: "He that is of God heareth God's word," and since thou dost rejoice to hear and read the things that are

LUBERT BERNER

of good report concerning the servants of God, I hope this cometh of Divine grace, which thou oughtest to guard with all diligence, and to incline thine heart continually to humility and virtue, which things were deeply rooted in Lubert. Once when he was standing near the kitchen grinding mustard, some of his friends from Zwolle came desiring to visit him; and when he saw them he was moved to speak to them lest perchance they might be offended if they were baulked of their desire to talk with him—for they were honourable men and had been appointed to the Magistracy. So the humble Lubert, just as he was, girt with his apron, approached and saluted his friends lovingly, not being ashamed to appear before them in the dress of a servant, but rather striving to please God by discharging a humble office. After talking with them for a short while he bade them farewell and returned to the task imposed upon him, and his friends went away much edified by his humility.

(19) At another time, when he was at Zwolle, some friends were walking with him and they were handsomely clad, but he was dressed plainly in his long habit as a simple Brother should be. And some who saw this said admiringly: "See how he goeth like a lamb in the midst of wolves." Thus to compare them was fitting, for their lives were utterly diverse. Once, in summer time, he was given a plain gray hood, old and faded, and Brother Amilius, who was very friendly with him and loved him well, said, to prove him: "Lubert, what manner of hood is that which thou hast? it doth become thee ill enough, for it doth hang about thy neck as if thou wert in a consumption." And Lubert replied cheerfully: "My Brother,

THE LIFE OF

what art thou saying? feel it and see how good the cloth is, and do not speak evil of it for I am not worthy to wear it." So Amilius hearing this was edified by his words.

(20) Amilius also told me the things following, concerning Lubert, saying: "He was so humble, and mortified his own will so much, that he would submit even to a little child, and obey the least of the Brothers in the House as gladly as he obeyed Florentius himself, if the latter placed such an one in charge of the House. He was of none account and an outcast in his own eyes, so he thought the more highly of others, especially those who served the Brothers in the kitchen. He used to say: "John Kettel and his companion go far beyond us in virtue, and they will yet become our superiors, for they put us to shame for our lukewarmness and themselves do their work with all zeal. They seem to be our servants but in very truth they are our Lords and Masters in the Way of God." It was out of the humility of his heart that he said this and so instructed himself and others in most excellent wise. He had a good knowledge of writing and rejoiced to exercise this art, for he shunned sloth and was instant and diligent in the labour of his hands, and in inducing others to write.

(21) Once when a boy asked him to set a copy he consented kindly, and did it, saying: "Thou wilt learn to be a good writer, for thou hast long and pliant fingers": and by the co-operation of God this prophecy was fulfilled. He wrote in round hand these words as a copy and as a good motto: "Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

LUBERT BERNER

These words had the savour of true wisdom to him, wherefore he put aside the sayings of the philosophers and exhorted his pupil to follow the humility of Christ which leadeth a man to true wisdom and to the attainment of everlasting felicity. When therefore this humble and devout priest Lubert, surnamed ten Bosche, who is famed for his many virtues, was about to depart from this present world, he earnestly besought the Brothers to remember him in their prayers after his death by saying sometimes the prayer for the departed, especially at the time when they were writing in their cells.

(22) When the deadly plague was raging grievously in Deventer and the neighbouring places, and had taken away several of the Devout besides others from this life, and had (as one may piously believe) given them part in Eternal Light in Heaven, it so fell out that Lubert also was seized with the said plague. In the month of July, three days before the Feast of the Blessed Mary Magdalene, he began to be sick and to keep his bed, saying that he should not abide here long. The Brothers laboured on his behalf with many prayers and sought means of healing him from God, and from skilful chirurgeons, for all desired that he might live. But his prayer ascending to the ears of Those that dwell in Heaven availed more than the longing of the Brothers, so when one of them said: "We shall not long be separated but shall soon hold commune again in Florentius' cell," he replied: "Never again in this world, but in Heaven and with the Saints," for he desired to be released and to be with Christ. So on the Feast of the Blessed Mary Magdalene he bade them sing in his presence the sequence "Laus tibi Christe,"

THE LIFE OF

and when they had sung it he said: "What devout and fervent words are those"; and he repeated this verse to himself meditatively: "What should the sick soul do if she had received no help, and if there were no physician there?" Many devout persons who were present hearing this wept, but he being joyful in the Lord consoled their grief.

(23) Brother Amilius, who was assiduous in ministering to him, carefully kept account of all the edifying words which he heard fall from his lips; and after Lubert's death he faithfully made record of them, writing them in order in a letter which he sent to the Brothers who were absent; and this letter I have determined to insert here as a pious memorial of Lubert that thereby his happy death, and the last moments of his life may be more fully known. When about eight days had elapsed since the beginning of his sickness and he grew no better, at length wearied by his many sufferings he reached his last hour, and filled with divine comfort he fell asleep in the Lord joyfully and happily, surrounded by the Brothers, who kept watch over his death-bed with earnest prayers. He died on the twenty-sixth of July, the day following the Feast of St. James the Apostle, in the year of our Lord's Incarnation, 1398, during the reign of Pope Boniface the Ninth. His body was reverently buried in the churchyard of St. Lebuin, near that of his companion John Ketel—that devout servant of Christ—toward the southern side of the church. There several other Brothers, who died as time went on, were buried near him, and there they rest in peace.

LUBERT BERNER

An account of Lubert's happy death written by the beloved Brother Amilius

(24) In the Name of the Lord Amen. In the year 1398, after our Lord's Nativity, and on July the nineteenth, Lubert ten Bosche—that is Lubert of the Wood or Forest—an humble priest, and a man of great devotion, was seized with the plague. The first two or three days after his seizure he spent upon his bed in sleep or stupor without consciousness, as usually occurs in this disease, and during this time he became so weak as to seem very near to death. Afterwards, however, he grew easier and seemed to those who stood by to be like to get better; but he so bore himself as one that had a certain knowledge that he should die, for to some he offered consolation and said farewell to others. Likewise he dictated several letters to his familiar friends who were Priests and Religious scattered about in divers places, praying them that, since he was passing to Purgatory and the place of suffering, they would help him with their Masses, watchings and prayers. Then he desired that the Brothers of our House might be assembled, saying that he thought it profitable and fitting that he should make his peace with those with whom he had lived during so many years, and should ask their pardon and forgiveness, and so depart. So when they were gathered together he stood near, leaning upon the staff which supported him, and began thus:

“I have dwelt for so many years in the House of Florentius and yet have amended my life too little, nor have I made that progress in virtue which I set before me when I came hither. My whole intent and resolution was willingly to give myself

THE LIFE OF

to all humiliation, obedience, lowliness, charity, and the other virtues, and to submit to Florentius and all the Brothers; but I have not so done as—now that I am about to die—I should rejoice to have done. Nay! I have often been a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to you by my pride;” and here he mentioned various other sins of which in his humility he accused himself.

(25) Then, weak as he was, he most humbly prostrated himself upon the earth, and with much humility and tears besought pardon from them all. Who could be so hard of heart as to refrain from tears to see so great a man, a Father and Brother so loving, thus prostrate on the ground and weeping! Then rising and leaning upon his staff he began once more to address the Brothers, exhorting them faithfully and lovingly to keep their unity and charity to one another, and to strive continually to submit themselves, and to be subject one to the other in that obedience that is of love; and he urged each one to strive to be the least of all and the servant of all, to be faithful guardians to one another, admonishing one another in charity, correcting one another for sin and evil manners in brotherly love, not passing over or approving any sin either of commission or omission; so should they attain true unity and charity by the rooting out of sin. He added, “If ye thus remain at unity, and thus act, ye shall have nought to fear from any man, and shall be like to a fenced city which may not be taken, otherwise your affairs shall quickly come to nought, and all your strivings shall be nothing accounted of, but become as it were vanity and foolishness.” After this he humbly besought the Brothers to pray for him in faith, and to remember him in all their

LUBERT BERNER

prayers as he had confidence therein but particularly in those supplications wherein they exercised themselves during the daily labour of their hands; and so saying farewell to the Brothers he let them go. On the second day he dictated a letter in the following terms to be sent to Florentius and the other Brothers who were absent.

The letter of the devout and humble Lubert to Florentius

(26) Peace of mind and every good thing be with thee; Most beloved Father, I believe that our dear Brother Amilius hath written to thee concerning my sickness, yet I write to inform thee further that from the Friday when I fell sick until the following Tuesday I lay in stupor and unconscious, unable to turn myself upon my bed; but now since the Lord hath of His goodness rekindled my poor intelligence in some measure I cannot depart in peace out of this misery without once more at least—and for the last time in this life—prostrating myself at thy feet and unfolding to thee as to my father my sufferings and the endless pressure of necessity which doth particularly beset me. For now I must be brought before the dreadful Judgement Seat of God, in the presence of His Angels and of them that are our especial Advocates, confounded by those sins for the amendment of which thou hast often instructed me. But I, alas! did not think of those sins as thou didst judge them, nor perceive how grievous and terrible they are. Oh! Father Florentius, I cannot before the Judgement Seat of God deny what thine own hand hath written to me concerning my passions, yet in some measure it was I

THE LIFE OF

myself who by many importunate prayers constrained thee to write. This document I have entrusted to our beloved Amilius to be laid before thee, that considering these and my other offences thou mayest think the more pitifully of the sufferings I must undergo in that place of dread, that place of direful pains, and mayest succour me by thy prayers, of which I stand in urgent need.

Most beloved Father, if I were in thy presence I would entreat thee with tears to grant me true and fatherly pardon for other offences, and especially my disobedience, lest I be condemned yet more dreadfully for these sins, and I doubt not that thou wouldest freely pardon me.

(27) Now I will speak to you, most beloved Brothers, for by your life and conversation ye have often recalled me from my lukewarmness and sloth to the amending of my life, and often have most lovingly admonished me for my passions; but—as ye know—I, wretched man that I am! have not amended as much as I might and ought to have done, nor could your words pierce the hardness of my heart which would have been for my good, for I knew not nor foresaw that as I had so lived in this life, I must therefore be taken suddenly to the place of dreadful pains, where are gnawing serpents, fierce lions, ravening wolves, and countless monstrous devils. If I can repay you for all your exhortations and good example I will never be backward in so doing; but this I cannot do, for whatever small progress I may have made in this life I have made it by the help of God and of you, and I ascribe it not to myself. And now for all my sins of neglect I prostrate myself before your feet with heart and lips accus-

LUBERT BERNER

ing myself before God and you, and praying for pardon for every one of them.

Likewise I beseech you that ye see to it that the day of my death be announced to those persons whom ye see fit to tell, though I know that ye will not fail in this, and that ye cause the Holy Office to be said and Vigil to be kept, with such other observances as may seem good to you. Farewell! Farewell! and again Farewell for ever! all ye whom in this life I shall see no more.

(28) Having dictated this letter on the Vigil of St. James the Apostle he sat down to read it again if perchance there might be aught that he wished to add or remove from it, but suddenly there came upon him such trembling and weakness that all his strength went from him, so they that stood by took him back and laid him again upon his bed. Soon afterward he began to be so shaken with violent pain and distress that he cried aloud with a lamentable and pitiful voice and asked that the Brothers of the House and other devout persons from without should be called together to succour him with their prayers. And when they were so called his breast began to quake and his whole body trembled and was violently shaken, he grew pale and sweated; and his eyes were distorted in dreadful wise, he groaned and gnashed with his teeth, uttering moans of distress and other pitiable sounds. Meantime the Devout ran together and with many tears prayed earnestly for him, and he, beholding them, also wept some little space.

(29) Then he signed to me, Amilius, for I was continually with him, to take away the taper which we had placed in his hand supposing him to be at the point to die, and to read the Seven Psalms with him, for he thought that he should not die

THE LIFE OF

yet. So he began reading one verse with me while the other Brothers responded with the remainder, and thus he continued to the end with great fervour and devotion: and when the Psalms were ended he said "Let us abide under the protection of Holy Mary," so he began the "Salve Regina" and the proper collects, and this Antiphon he repeated again and again with great love and devotion; saying the Collect and often changing the words, led thereto by these emotions. From time to time the power of speech failed him, but he continually began again the same Antiphon that the others might repeat it throughout. When this had continued for a time he bade me tell the Brothers to pray silently and with heartfelt compunction for him, and then he lay for a long time speechless and as it would seem in great pain and distress. But the Devout and the Brothers remained with him all day in prayer looking for his death from hour to hour. Having lain thus for a long time he called me, saying, "Brother Amilius, the power of speech hath been restored to me. Therefore tell the Brothers and all the Devout every one of them to recite the Psalter for me, and at the beginning and end of every Psalm to say one 'Ave Maria' on bended knees." Afterward he said, "Tell them that I care not for a great number of Psalms, let them wait awhile between the several Psalms in meditation and pray the Lord for me with heartfelt compunction lest their minds be confused by the number of Psalms which they recite." When I had told them this he bade me ask all that were gathered together to pray for him, saying the Seven Psalms, the Hours of Our Lady, and of the Holy Spirit, and anything else they could repeat, continuing constantly in

LUBERT BERNER

prayer with him, and so to abide until his death; and when I had given them this direction he added: "Brother, I fear that I am laying a heavy burden upon our Brothers and Sisters, but necessity doth constrain me, for I cannot trust at all in myself, but lean greatly upon the prayers of the Devout. How seemeth it to you?" And I comforted him, bidding him be of good cheer, for they would most gladly do this for him. Then from the hour of Vespers or thereabouts until the eighth hour he lay speechless in a great fever and then began to speak again and became quite peaceful.

(30) After awhile he called me to him and told me how he had fared during the day; at first he said he had suffered great and wonderful temptations, for there had come to him an evil spirit in the form of our Brother John Ketel which strove with many devices to deceive him. This spirit told him many marvellous things about the Glory of Heaven and divers subtle and high matters, many of which were true and conformable to the Scriptures, but therewith it mingled many things that were false. It also told him many marvels which he could not explain for its manner of speech was, he said, that of a spirit, and it seemed to be conjoined to his own soul so that it was as it were talking with himself and his own soul answered him. "It was," said he, "very displeasing to this Spirit that I spoke to you from time to time, for when I would do so the Spirit said to me, "Speak not to the flesh, speak not to the flesh." It was also much displeased that I had procured so many prayers to be offered up by the Devout, and that I had such confidence therein. And when I asked you to read the Psalms the Spirit said within me, "Dross, Dross! why putttest thou thy

THE LIFE OF

trust in these Psalms? or in Mary, Gregory, Jerome, and the like? Thou oughtest to put thy trust in God; He is angry with thee that thou trustest in these rather than in Him only—yet because thou art fainthearted and fearful, and hast not done this of malice, He is merciful to thee; but take heed that thou do this no more. I, John Ketel, did not thus, yet have I reached the Kingdom of Heaven without passing through Purgatory:” and when I asked why this was so he gave the two following reasons.

(31) The first was that he had renounced all temporal goods and riches altogether, for the sake of God and the Salvation of his own soul, and had given himself to so lowly a station in life (*i.e.* the work of the kitchen), and had never repented of this renunciation. The second reason was that he had eagerly and zealously persevered in such work without any desire to return to his former state; and also because he had shown a firm resolution and great zeal to abide until his death in a condition so humble and in an office so lowly (for this he did that he might be the servant of all), and had in fact continued until his death in that office as he had resolved. Then Lubert said to me: “Brother, I know that what the evil spirit told me of our trusty and beloved Brother John Ketel was true, but whether or no he hath come to the Kingdom of Heaven without passing through Purgatory I know not. That evil spirit told me (added he) that I also should escape Purgatory and pass to the Kingdom of Heaven, and when I asked the cause hereof, it said: “Thou art a martyr in the sight of God, because thou hast laid down thy life for thy Brethren and Sisters in that of thy love and charity thou hast chosen

LUBERT BERNER

to remain with them in so great danger of death." Then the humble Lubert said to me: "Whether I shall go to Heaven, escaping Purgatory, I know not, though I cannot deny that I abode with my Brethren out of love and charity to them; yet it is enough that the spirit strove with many words to induce me to trust in mine own merits and virtue; yet I have been ever fearful and have never trusted in myself, nor do I now so trust—all my confidence and hope is in the mercy of God, in the intercessions and merits of the glorious Virgin and the other Saints, and in the prayers of the Devout, wherefore I do rejoice and am glad that many holy psalms and prayers have been said. Sometimes the spirit took away from me all my senses save that of hearing, and this too he strove to take away, but was not able."

Besides this Lubert told me of many marvellous things which the Devil had said to him, of which some were heretical and contrary to the Faith, and to these strove to persuade Lubert to assent, but he mingled with his lies some things that are true. "By these proofs I know," said Lubert, "that it was a wicked spirit which was trying to deceive me, because it ever mingled falsehood and lies with the truth. It doth appear to me, therefore, that it is profitable and necessary for one who is dying to have some man of understanding—like my Brothers—at his side until his departure." These things he told me on the Vigil of St. James the Apostle after the eighth hour in the evening.

(32) After this, weak as he was, he continued in great tranquillity and peace of heart until his death, for he earnestly desired to be released and to be with Christ, having a sure confidence and hope in the coming of our Lord Jesus, the glorious

THE LIFE OF

Virgin Mary and the other Saints. In this ardent longing he continued until the day after the Feast of St. James, sighing and pondering over the Holy Psalms, especially the Psalm of "Blessed are they that are undefiled in the way." He often asked how near he was to death, whether he showed the signs thereof, whether his short breathing did not portend death, and so forth: and we could give him no better comfort than to tell him the end was near at hand.

(33) Sometimes he cried out, but with great trustfulness: "O when will the Lord Jesus and Holy Mary with the Holy Angels come to release me? I trust that they will not delay their coming. Would that they might deign to come quickly and to make an end! I hope that I shall not long abide here," and so forth. Very often he evoked Holy Mary, Jerome, and Gregory (for to these he was especially devoted) and other Saints to pray for him, to be present with him, and succour him in the hour of death. He besought us also to speak a few words to him from time to time and urge him to prayer and to the Invocation of Saints; but for the rest to pray for him in silence, with sighing and tears, and to await his death with him, having our hearts repentant toward the Lord. Thus he came to his last hour, so fervent, so devoted, so ardently desiring to be released, so lovingly and confidently awaiting the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Virgin Mary, the Holy Angels, and the other saints—nor, as it would seem, was he balked of his desire.

(34) By this time he was already dead and quite cold in all his other members, and life seemed to flutter only in his tongue and breast, for there was scarce one of his limbs that he could move;

LUBERT BERNER

but suddenly, without help from any one, he raised himself up by his own motion and clasped his hands and lifted them upward, keeping his eyes fixed upon the wall, toward which he most reverently bowed his head with all devotion, and he lifted up his hoarse and broken voice, and cried with all the strength he had: "Of Thy Glory, Thy goodness, Thy mercy, receive, oh! receive me! Of Thy Glory, Thy Glory, Thy goodness, Thy goodness, of Thy mercy, receive me, receive me, oh! receive me." While he sat upright he repeated these words again and again, and at length laid him down upon his bed, but twice afterward he raised himself again with the same motions and gestures, and repeated the same words. And again he sank back and lay seemingly in a deep stupor and amazement, but I asked him, saying: "Brother Lubert, what is it?" "How is it with thee?" and he answered me, as it were in great amazement: "Wonderful, wonderful, marvellous, marvellous, yea, great and marvellous are the things which I saw when I sat up;" and then he added, "Call the Brothers, call the Brothers," and, when I called them, immediately he breathed his last, after a short struggle, and fell asleep happily in the Lord, full of virtue and good works, for whom Blessed be God! for ever and ever, Amen.

From a letter of Florentius in praise of Lubert

(35) Who that knew our beloved Brother Lubert would not grieve for his death? who that loved him would not weep? who would not mourn and lament for our House if he diligently considered what ruin and calamity that death doth

THE LIFE OF

threaten thereto? What an example of humility, what a pattern of devotion to the Community was taken from us when he died! Is any one of us who survive so fervent in all the exercises of devotion and contempt for the world? doth any promote the common good as did Lubert? is any consumed by godly zeal for our House as he was? Is there any that doth so esteem himself as worthless, lacking in wisdom, insufficient? a pattern of all these virtues hath been taken from us by his death; for this cause it is just that he who loveth our House should mourn piously for him; for this cause he doth weep that is solicitous for our progress in spiritual things, and our grief doth bear proportion to the love we felt for him, for the more closely our hearts were knitted to him the more bitterly do they feel this severance. Verily our heart and soul were at one in the Lord with our most beloved Brother: judge ye therefore from that unity what the pain of severance is, and take the measure of our sadness by the abundance of our love. But if ye desire a brief and clear proof of the measure of that sadness and that pain which were so heavy and so grievous that we could scarce read two or three lines of your letter, or write two or three in reply thereto without shedding tears in such abundance as to hinder us from continuing; if, I say, ye would know the measure of our grief and sadness search the depths of your own hearts, all ye who loved Lubert even as we loved him!

*Certain excerpts taken from the devout exercises
of Lubert*

(36) Thy task shall be to labour to uproot thy vices, and to gain virtue; but unless thou

LUBERT BERNER

dost resign thyself to God simply and with all thy heart, committing all else to him, it will rather engender presumption in thee, making thee hard of heart, doubtful, restless and cowardly. Labour therefore with modesty, quietness and fear, but resign and commit the issue to God that He may do according as He will. Be not sad nor down-cast if thou art not able to fulfil thy purpose, for it may be that God doth will it so lest thou shouldst trust in thine own virtue.

When thou prayest have no thought save of God and thy Psalmody, considering that He seeth thee. Give up thy will freely and wholly to Him, and utterly put aside, so far as thou art able, all unnecessary and empty thoughts. Strive so to behave thyself as if thou wert standing alone in the Presence of God, the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints; to Them show thy necessities and the wounds of thy soul.

When thou dost pray, or talk, or wheresoever thou art, let not thy thoughts dwell upon the Brothers—or any others who may be present—for to do so doth greatly distract thy thoughts from thyself, doth dissolve the virtue of thy mind, doth make thee bitter and suspicious, doth darken thine understanding, doth engender forgetfulness of God and love for the applause of men; doth befog the mind and disturb the conscience. Keep thy heart at peace and turned away from shadows and from sin, but turned toward God.

(37) Let thine aspect be like that of the other Brothers, neither too severe, nor ostentatiously cheerful, and so continue to comport thyself when thou art alone within thy cell; and if in anything that thou doest thou art inclined to comport thyself otherwise, strive to amend in this; so shalt

THE LIFE OF

thou always do the will of God with a quiet mind, shalt guard thyself from thy vices and continue at all times cheerful.

In every way and in all things beware of acting hastily, but do everything deliberately and without ostentation. Thou shouldest never speak harshly to any, nor bring a railing or derisive accusation against any, but rather implore and admonish him as charity doth demand.

Whenever thou art disquieted in mind bear patiently and quietly those things that are contrary to thy nature and disposition, but for the time being strive not to hinder nor do anything at all in that matter about which thou art disquieted beyond reason; wait rather until God's grace and thy peace of mind return, and meanwhile flee to thy cell and to prayer because thou art weak and beset, and think "In your patience ye shall possess your souls." From time to time choose to be alone, to labour with thine hands, to pray patiently, and to act without unreasoning haste. Always choose such matters for thy meditation about God and the Holy Scriptures as shall kindle thee to the Love and Fear of God or to horror for thy vices.

(38) Whatsoever thou doest in temporal matters, give not too much heed to appearance and outward show, but aim at doing the Will of God only and commit everything to Him.

Turn away thy heart and thine eyes from men; be constant to that which is within and forget that which is without: reach out to heaven with prayer, sighs, study and repentance, and whet thy mind continually upon these. Avoid ostentation and presumption, and put away the images of men from thy heart.

LUBERT BERNER

All virtue, all progress, doth consist in this, to follow the Will of God and to please Him.

Strive for this that thine intention may be toward God and according to His will, and cast away the passions of thy soul.

Take this as a rule that cannot misguide thee: whatsoever our Father Florentius and the Brethren may determine, that is God's will for thee to do, for He doth dwell in them and they seek nothing save His pleasure.

Do everything as Florentius shall advise:—and if he is absent act in like manner by the counsel of Gerard in all things as if it were the counsel of God; for Gerard is far wiser, more humble, more prudent, more spiritual, more thoughtful than thou art, and his acts are more in accord with the Will of God than are thine.

Thou shouldest be very careful to avoid the occasion of sin. Often when thou art at peace thou seemest to thyself to be somewhat, but when thou dost mingle with outward things that which was hidden in thee cometh to light—for this thou oughtest deeply to abase thyself. Much talking doth take a man away from himself, leadeth him into ignorance, taketh away his forethought, and doth bring forth confusion. Therefore it is needful for one who is disposed to much speaking to meditate often, and pause or check himself so as to think whether what he shall say shall be pleasing to God or whether it shall tend to boastfulness, love for the praise of men and vain-glory.

For thy words, look to it that they be such as are necessary, pious and profitable; but before all things that they be in accordance with the Will of God. Thou mayest by no means speak loosely nor by thy words incite others thereto.

THE LIFE OF

(39) Never speak hastily and mockingly to a man of his faults before others, for to do this is a sign of pride and presumption, and is an ill example to others.

Learn to talk little, to use but few words, and to speak with forethought. Wait while others speak, and be careful lest thou listen to aught that may do thee hurt.

Sift also the words of every man to find whether they be true or slanderous.

Be firmly resolved by the Grace of God not to speak of the evil deeds of any, nor willingly to hear of them save to some good purpose, and even then be cautious lest thou be led astray.

Let it be thy habit not to pour out thy heart too earnestly upon anything whatsoever, whether it be a temporal or whether it be a spiritual matter; but always hold back modestly in fear of thine own vices. Go forward with discretion and step by step; advance in due season and never altogether retreat, but keep thy heart sustained by the Word of God and so bent backward as to hold in check all thy vices in general, but especially any one vice which for the time thou dost particularly fear. Thus, by God's grace, with due moderation and mature thought as in His sight, speak and do whatsoever thou thinkest shall please Him.

In thine eating avoid greed and gluttony; rather restrain thine appetite, that the blind and confused desires of nature may be enlightened by repentance and by a hunger to hear the reading. Take some portion of the reading and as it were ruminate thereon, or similarly that portion of Scripture, "A certain man made a great supper." If at any time thou art disordered or oppressed in

LUBERT BERNER

the head after eating, then flee to thy cell, or by talking awhile with other men, strive for the future to be more cautious in keeping guard over thyself; yet to pray and flee is safer. "Happy is the man that feareth alway;" and know this in very truth, that when in place of being afraid thou dost fall into security, thou fallest away from God and art led captive by devils and by thine own passions. Yet thou oughtest to fear in such a manner as shall make thee trust the more in God; the weaker thou seemest to thyself the stronger shall He make thee. Therefore it is good rather to trust others and to be fearful for thyself. In the things of God learn virtue and conduct from others, and fear to boast thyself;—for thy sake Christ became a learner; for thy sake He held His peace.

(40) Learn to remain within and to live the common social life amid the Brethren and the rest, and think highly of them; consider their virtues and thine own vices. When thou art in company with another, always think about some virtue of his, and of thine own lack thereof, so as to humiliate thyself inwardly for those vices of thine which are known to God, to the Angels, and to thine own self. Approach thy studies as if to take food for thy soul, that she being refreshed by what thou readest may learn to be wholly occupied therewith, to forget temporal things and to be held back from sin. Also study is of no great profit unless thou dost pray and so deal therewith as food is dealt with by the teeth—otherwise it is but little good. Therefore deal thus with it, and let it pass into thy soul, like food into the belly, to be transformed into virtue and good works, that the soul may be sustained thereby as by food. For as the body is refreshed by food so is the soul by virtue;

THE LIFE OF

thou oughtest never to study anything that doth not refresh the soul, for the fruit of study is the strength of the soul and the gaining of virtue. To study for the sake of teaching others or for any other purpose else save as aforesaid doth not nourish the soul, but doth make it unwholesome as superfluous humours make the body. Such study doth engender vain-glory, a heart puffed up, disorderly manners, empty thoughts, unstableness of mind, forgetfulness and light thoughts of God, love for the praise of man, a troubled conscience, a darkened understanding, and it doth render the soul faint and weak rather than refresh it. Wherefore to study in moderation and as it were to chew thoroughly what thou redest doth better refresh the soul than to study many things thoughtlessly and without so doing. It doth follow that that soul is dead, or doth consume herself which doth not so digest the word of God as to convert it into virtue and good works; such an one doth decay by reason of divers lusts and the desire for honour, and is eaten of devils as the body is of worms.

(41) When the clock doth strike bethink thee that thou art in the midst of thine enemies, and art not sufficient of thyself; therefore cry to God and pray, saying—"Forsake me not, O Lord God, Thou art my God, depart not far from me." Sometimes invoke the Blessed Virgin and say the Ave Maria. Remember that God seeth thee and that thy works are presented before Him by the Angels, whatsoever good thou hast done, the progress thou hast made, and the evil thou hast committed. When thou hearest the bell, think, "Arise, ye dead and come to judgement."

Always strive to follow the will of others in those things that are not sinful or contrary to the

HENRY BRUNE

will of God, and always put aside thine own desire and thine own counsel.

Learn to bear those things that are vexatious to all men, and to thee are difficult, though it cost thee toil and pain; and never answer any other man impatiently. Rather choose to be pitiful and prefer excess in this to overhardness.

When thou dost ask a question of thy Superior or Rector remember that it is the Lord Who dwelleth in them that speaketh to thee through their mouth and declareth His will; think how perilous it is for thee to resist His ordinance that is declared through them.

Think many times of thy daily sins, from what root they spring. Inordinate fear or too great presumption do hinder thee every day.

To be inclined towards riches, pleasures, high esteem, the praise of men, the delights of the world, and thine own will; to be inclined towards these, I say, and to do that which is good in thine own eyes, and to avoid and think lightly of humility is to go back to sin, and to be turned away from Christ, and from the rule of thy spiritual Father; for the very road to virtue is this, to resist sin and humbly to obey one's Superior.

LIFE OF HENRY BRUNE

(1)



THOUGHT not to pass over one who was a man of deep devotion and holy simplicity, and a priest of angelic purity; and I think it fitting to place his life next in order to that of Lubert, who was his com-

THE LIFE OF

rade from the first and his most beloved fellow-priest, and to set forth here somewhat in praise of him. This is that Henry Brune who was the companion of Lubert; a man beloved of God and accepted of men; one that was kindly to all and burdensome to none. He was born in Holland and was a citizen of Leyden, being sprung from honourable parents and lineage. He, however, counted the riches and honours of the world as of no worth, and withdrawing from the sight of his friends, sought the Lord in the days of his youth, and clave to Him with a perfect heart even unto his old age. He remained under obedience in the House of Florentius, in all humility and meekness, hearing the confessions of the Devout and celebrating Mass with great devotion and reverence; for he lived in quietness and simplicity of heart without a care for temporal things, and dwelt amid the Brethren uncomplainingly, having a good reputation throughout all Deventer, and being known amongst the Devout in divers places as an Israelite indeed in whom was no guile or wickedness; as one without bitterness like a dove and gifted with a singular innocency of life. His eyes were ever looking to the Lord, and whensoever he could be alone he ceased not from prayer and devout meditation.

(2) Once in winter time he was sitting by the fire, warming his hands, but he turned his face to the wall and secretly continued his prayers, observing strictly the rule of silence. And I when I saw this, was greatly edified, and loved him yet the more, nor did I ever hear a complaint concerning him save that he celebrated Mass somewhat more slowly than the others; and yet by so doing he drew many laymen to devotion when he cele-

HENRY BRUNE

brated, and this tardiness was readily excused to him since it sprang from his unwillingness to be separated from his beloved Jesus.

(3) It happened that one of the faithful was tempted in a matter of faith by a secret assault of the Devil, for he began to have some doubt concerning the Sacrament of the Altar and the Presence therein of the Very Body of Christ. And so, as he stood to hear the Mass which this devout priest was celebrating, he often sighed, being grieved by the wicked suggestions of that malignant spirit, and he prayed to the Lord that he would deign to pity him for his wavering mind. And the merciful God who doth succour souls to their salvation in many and marvellous ways, did teach this man and console him comfortably in the faith by showing him a new and strange vision. For he saw not the Species of bread between the hands of the priest, but in place thereof there appeared before him the form of One more glorious than the sons of men; and being greatly bewildered and trembling, he returned thanks and blessed God. But the priest knew nothing of this and finished the office of the Mass with the Benediction after the usual manner, for this vision was not shown for the priest's sake, for he was full of faith and grace, but to strengthen one who was weak in the faith.

(4) Since I am now speaking of the Revered Sacrament I will also mention a similar thing concerning a priest in the province of Frisia, whose life was less praiseworthy. This story I heard from the mouth of our Brother Alardus of pious memory, who told me that there was with him a certain priest whose learning was small and his reputation not bright: and when this priest entered

THE LIFE OF

the Church to celebrate the Divine Mysteries, an honourable Matron, knowing his lack of learning, began to think scornfully of him and to murmur, saying: "What art thou trying to do, ignorant man that thou art? How can one that is so unworthy duly celebrate so great a Sacrament?" While she was thinking this the priest began to celebrate and to touch the Holy Elements and consecrate Them; and when the Sacred Host was elevated after the Consecration according to the Ritual of the Church, and all the congregation were adoring in faith upon their bended knees, the aforesaid matron opened her eyes, and to her amazement and perplexity saw, at the moment of the Elevation, the Figure of the Man Christ. After Mass was done she told this in private to another priest and humbly confessed the evil thoughts which she had formerly had about the Celebrant; and her Confessor having diligently inquired how the matter came to pass, and concerning the Vision, answered her, saying: "God hath allowed this to come to pass for thy Salvation, lest in future thou shouldest think evil of priests or doubt that they do truly consecrate even if they are of ill-reputation and unworthy life." The woman, hearing this, held her faith sure and left it to God to judge His priests.

(5) Let it not irk thee to hear yet another miracle concerning this most Holy Sacrament.

When I entered the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes to sojourn there, a certain Religious Clerk, who abode there for a long time with me, had occasion to go to a neighbouring Monastery: and when he was on the way, one that was a layman joined himself to him and became his travelling companion and talked to him as a friend. So as

HENRY BRUNE

they were walking together and conversing about God, the layman said to the Clerk who accompanied him: "My friend, I will tell thee one small matter that hath happened in my life. For a long time I was in such a condition that when I entered a Church I could never see the Sacrament of the Altar in the Priest's hands, and thinking that I stood too far off, and that owing to the dimness of my eyes I could not see well, I approached as near as I dared and as was permitted—but this profited me not at all, for still I saw nothing between the Priest's hands. This continued to me for more than a year, but I did not duly consider what the reason might be. At length, coming to myself and being greatly perplexed I betook me to a priest and laid bare the whole matter in confession; and he heard me kindly, and carefully searching out the secrets of my heart, found that I was in a state of enmity towards a neighbour to whom I would on no account forgive a trespass that he had committed against me. So the good and prudent Confessor, when he knew of this sin of malice, instructed me with chiding and admonition, affirming that it would be most perilous to continue thus hard of heart, and that I could never deserve pardon unless from my heart I forgave all trespasses. And this he said had happened to me because I was not worthy to look upon the Holy Sacrament since mine eye was evil. Hearing this pious admonition of the priest I consented to his counsel, and with hearty repentance forgave all injuries, resolving for the future not to avenge myself, so that I might be reconciled to God and regain the grace that I had lost. Then at length the priest gave me absolution, and having imposed penance upon me, let

THE LIFE OF

me go. Immediately afterward I went into the Church and heard Mass, and having regained the favour of God I saw most clearly the Holy Body of Christ in the hands of the priest, and returning thanks to God I blessed Him for all His marvellous works.

(6) But I must return to my task and deal briefly with the happy death of Henry Brune, for as his life was adorned with virtue, so the end thereof was deservedly a happy passing away from this world. Amongst the other virtues of this pious and devout man was this, that he was subject in all humility to his superior, giving a good example to priests and clerks not to exalt themselves above the younger Brethren by reason of their priestly rank. Sometimes on feast days he celebrated before the lepers by leave of Florentius, and I served for him on those occasions.

(7) Once he went with the Brothers to obtain indulgences at Arnheim, and while they were in the way he was asked for what consideration he would give up his indulgences. To this he replied: "I would gladly give them all in exchange for this grace, that whensoever I should say anything good to anyone, he should straightway be converted and amend his life." The Brothers who heard it were marvellously edified by his good reply which proceeded from that earnest zeal for souls which dwelt within his pious and pure heart.

(8) So in the year of our Lord 1439 the plague was raging at Zutphen where the Brothers of the House of Florentius, and many other Religious, then dwelt, having fled from Deventer; and Henry Brune fell sick with the disease and lay at the point of death, confidently waiting to receive the

HENRY BRUNE

reward of his labours from the Hand of the Lord. He had continued in the Community almost from the time of Gerard Groote and had fulfilled the Office of the Priesthood for about forty-four years, having far outlived all the rest of those who had known their first fervour in the Religious Life with him. But throughout his days he laboured at the work of writing, and I have often seen him washing vessels in the kitchen, and doing other lowly tasks.

(9) He knew scarcely anything save the things that pertain to God and the salvation of souls, nor cared to speak of aught else. And that which had been the habit of his life he maintained unto death, for he recited all the Hours till the very moment that he gave up his soul, nor during his illness did he cease his reading of the Holy Scriptures, for he sought comfort rather in the Word of God than in the discourses of men. The departure of this most godly priest was in the aforesaid year of our Lord, on the day following the Feast of Saint Bartholomew the Apostle (being the feast-day of St. Gregory, Bishop of Utrecht), at about the eleventh hour of the day, and he was buried in the Cemetery of Saint Walburga, the Virgin, which pertains to the College of Canons in Zutphen.

THE LIFE OF

THE LIFE OF GERARD OF ZUTPHEN

(1)



OW it is my purpose to trace briefly the virtues of the devout and learned Gerard of Zutphen, and to set up his writings and example before the coming generation as a pattern to them, and a good memorial of his life, for he hath deserved to be named in a foremost place amid those brothers who formed the first of our Communities and were zealous followers of the Divine Law. Although he lived for but a short time, yet he left us Doctrinal Treatises that are most acceptable, for he was a very diligent student of the Holy Scriptures, and from the dark sayings of the learned he extracted divers aromatic spices having virtue against the distempers of vice to heal the languors of the soul, as doth appear particularly in two books which he put forth, of which one doth begin "A certain Man" and the other is entitled, "Blessed is the Man." From his infancy and the days of his youth he was disposed to learning, quick of wit, eager to study the liberal arts, and heartily averse from worldly business and everything that might hinder the pursuit of wisdom.

(2) When he grew to manhood, being a youth of virtuous disposition, he went to foreign schools to be the better instructed, and busied himself with all diligence to be regular in attendance, to rise up very early in the morning and hasten in due time to hear the lectures. All the time given to study seemed short to him, for he was ever desirous of gathering from his master's lips some

GERARD OF ZUTPHEN

yet more fruitful knowledge which he seized and stored up in the inner chambers of his heart. The ardour of his mind for progress in learning burned so fiercely that he was greatly downcast when the teachers in the Schools did not lecture; and for this cause he sometimes wept because there were no lectures on holidays, for he was ill-content that any day should go by without yielding some fruit of learning. His ingenuous mind was far removed from the sloth of dullards and the idle roving of the wanton who run about the streets and take delight in senseless pastimes, but hate the School and seldom visit a Church. Gerard, on the other hand, thought upon the purpose for which he had come, and the reason for which Schools were founded, wherefore he applied himself zealously to study; and so wisely did he profit thereby as afterward to deserve to become a learner of that Wisdom that is eternal in place of the wisdom of the Schools; for by the ordinance of God he came at last to study at Deventer, and having found the devout Brothers there he attached himself closely to Florentius, and being by this time sufficiently instructed, he quitted the unstable worldly life for the sake of the love of Christ and his own Salvation.

(3) Being converted therefore he began to be diligent and instant in the amending of his life, to be zealous for spiritual progress, to separate his mind from all the entanglements of temporal things, and like a good son of the Cloister to love his cell, to give himself up to spiritual exercises, and to spend his time in study and writing. For this cause many wondered, because he was seldom seen to go forth, and sought no solace outside the Monastery. Yet he held the holy writings to stand

THE LIFE OF

for his greatest solace, and in place of seeking the wide expanse of earthly fields, he sought the hal-
lowed mansions of Heaven. When he went across
the street to the Church he seemed not to notice
the presence of other men, and when he was
asked whether he was not hindered by them of
the world who passed him, he answered: "It is
to me as though a herd of swine were passing;
what is it to me that they wear the form of
men?"

(4) As he sat in his cell he was so occupied
with his work, writing, reading, and prayer, that
often he left his window shut all day and did not
look out, although the weather might be fair
enough. One of the Brothers therefore said to
him: "Why dost thou not open thy window?
Thou dost sit here shut up as it were in a cellar,
and it would be good for thee to breathe the fresh
air"; and Gerard, being wholly given up to his
zeal for discipline, replied: "If I had spare time
and could take forethought about such matters,
perhaps it would be good to do so." When he
was asked by the same brother what his thoughts
were when the bell rang for the morning meal,
he said: "I go to one duty as to another." He
scarce cared at all what he ate, nor what the
hour for his meal might be, and when the neces-
sity for taking food was instant upon him, even
then he hastened to hear the reading rather than
to refresh the body, for he took no thought for
this latter, but rather was careful to restore the
powers of his soul, and if Florentius had not
anxiously provided for his needs he would soon
have destroyed himself and perished. Thus it
came about that for a long time he bore without
complaint and secretly a disease which physicians

GERARD OF ZUTPHEN

call fistula—for he was unwilling that any should be troubled with the care of him, or that expenses should be incurred on his behalf, and he preferred to suffer pain in the flesh as a wholesome medicine for the soul. But when Florentius discovered this he called a physician to take charge of him until he should be healed.

(5) He was librarian and keeper of the books, and showed great diligence in collecting and copying them. Likewise he lent copies of the sacred books to many Clerks outside the monastery that they might have readings therefrom in their own houses and in schools, and so avoid the telling of idle stories and aimless wanderings on holidays, which are seasons during which Clerks are specially admonished to give their mind to holy things. He used to say, "These books preach and teach better than any words of ours; for holy books are the luminaries of our souls and their comfort; they are the true medicine of life, which are not less necessary to us during our sojourn here than are the Sacraments of the Church." He loved the books of sacred Theology above all the riches of the world, and rejoiced more over a fair writ copy than over a sumptuous banquet, or wine of most sweet savour; for he knew that they shall not be wise who take pleasure in delicate meats and drinks; but they who are given up to sacred studies shall be filled with wisdom, and access to the hidden treasures of Heaven shall be their guerdon. Wherefore he dealt with books in all reverence, reading them with the utmost diligence and keeping them in careful ward.

(6) Many Clerks came to him to resolve divers doubtful matters, and heard his discourses gladly, for he was a man that was ready of speech and

THE LIFE OF

learned, proved by many disputations, and having knowledge how to answer every man. Florentius often summoned him to settle the business of the Community, and with his assistance was wont to deal with those matters in particular which demanded skilled knowledge of law and also seemed to require spiritual treatment. In such cases if any grave or difficult question arose he reserved it for the examination and decision of the wise whenever it was desirable to do so, and he listened reverently to learned doctors, followed the authority of the Saints without hesitation, and confirmed his own decisions clearly by sacred testimony. Wherefore he was highly praised by wise and learned men for the abilities that were united in him, but he himself accounted the praise of men as nothing, for he did not strive to pursue after subtlety of speech, but rather to preserve a good conscience. So in the understanding of the Holy Scriptures his long application to study profited him less than the informing grace of the Holy Spirit Who giveth understanding to the little ones and doth reveal His mysteries to minds that are pure. Verily Gerard directed all his exercises toward the attainment of this purity, impressing the fear of God upon those who were newly converted, chiding the slothful, and exhorting those who would go forward in virtue to mortify their vices.

(7) "If," said he, "we neglect to fight against our vices, our passions shall prevail, and we shall fall into the snares of the devil who is ever lying in wait to hinder our progress. Therefore we must labour with all diligence to quit us like men in fighting against them, for a crown of Eternal Glory hath been promised to him that overcometh." After that he had received the Light

GERARD OF ZUTPHEN

this Priest lived humbly and devoutly among the Brothers, being filled with grace, and though he had read many books, yet before his death he began to read again "The Mirror for Monks" and "The Progress of the Religious" as if he were a new convert, and from these books he strove to gather afresh the spirit of devotion, and to renew himself again to his first fervour. Yet burning with such zeal for progress he did not long survive, but mindful of Lubert that was dead—a friend whom he had deeply loved and for whose departure he had shed many tears—he soon followed after him. He was sent with Brother Amilius to the Abbot at Dickeninghe, a man learned in Canon law whom he used often to consult in legal questions, and as he was returning from his journey he came to Windesheim, and while passing the night there fell sick unto death.

(8) And Amilius said to him, "It seemeth to me that thou art near to die," to whom Gerard made answer, "So seemeth it to me also," and so as his sickness increased upon him, he breathed forth the breath of his life, like one steeped in a gentle sleep, during the night of the Feast of St. Barbara the Virgin, in the year of our Lord 1398, and in the thirty-first year of his age. His body was buried by the Prior and the Brothers, with due honour, in the path before the door of the Church.

Florentius hearing of the death of the beloved Gerard was very sad, and he with all the Brothers wept with great lamentation, for their deep love for him constrained them to mourn for the taking away of a brother most dear, who was a pillar of their House, and, as it were, another hand to Florentius in performing the business thereof.

But blessed be God Who lent us such a man!

THE LIFE OF

LIFE OF AMILIUS OF BUREN.

(1)



OW I must commemorate and set forth in this book the life of the beloved Amilius, a priest worthy to serve God. He succeeded Florentius, our Reverend Father, and was the second Ruler of the House, being one whom Florentius loved as a familiar friend, and a man decked with many jewels of virtue.

He sprang from a family of the Province of Gelders in the territory of the Count de Buren; and numbering amongst his forefathers men who had been Ministers of State, he was esteemed to hold like rank with them.

(2) When he came to study at Deventer, where a school for special learning was then flourishing, he showed such diligence and progress in the scholastic arts that in a short time he took his place amongst the foremost students as one of the more learned, and by reason of the subtlety of his understanding was held in more than ordinary favour by the Master of the School.

But by the gift of God it came about that a mind so great was not wasted away in a worldly life, nor sought to gain earthly honours through knowledge, but counted all such things as dross. So, being prevented by the Grace of Heaven, and inspired by the Most High, Amilius came to the House of Florentius and was drawn to him by the holiness of his discourse; he submitted himself to the counsel of the Holy Ghost speaking through the mouth of this Reverend Father, who gave him

AMILIUS OF BUREN

the monitions of that Wisdom that is unto salvation.

Amilius therefore putting aside his studies, and abandoning his carnal friends, became an humble Brother and a disciple of Christ; and by his example he was profitable to many by leading them to renounce the world and to serve Christ. He gave himself up to the fulfilment of the most humble duties; for his soul's salvation he spared not his body, nor sought he anything for his own advantage in this present life. In the virtue of holy obedience he bore heavy labour, such as milling and brewing and other tasks entrusted to him, which he performed cheerfully and with fidelity.

(3) Many wondered that, not being large of frame, he could carry out such heavy tasks, which assuredly he had not learned during his life in the world, nor had been accustomed to aforesaid; tasks, moreover, which a stronger than he would scarce have undertaken for worldly gain. But the love of Christ and the brotherly charity which availeth for all things ministered strength to his goodwill, so that his reward might be the greater in proportion as he laboured more fervently than all.

So pleasing was he to God and to the Brothers that, after Lubert and Gerard fell on sleep, he was immediately ordained to the priesthood whilst Florentius was yet alive, and when the time came that he should celebrate his first Mass, Florentius, clad in his surplice, attended him until he had finished the Office to the honour of God perfectly and with devotion. He celebrated at the Altar of St. Paul in the church of which Florentius was Vicar, before High Mass and privately, so that there was not a large congregation present.

THE LIFE OF

(4) So at the time of the Plague this man, eminent for piety, truly faithful in everything that was entrusted to him, and a comfortable friend to all that were in need, took charge of the stricken, being ready in the spirit of obedience and fraternal charity either to live or die with his Brethren. For he stood fearlessly by John Ketel, the Cook of the Community, by Lubert, and many others who were seized with the like disease, ministering to them until their death; and having rendered such service oftentimes to the Brethren he himself fell sick, but amended again, for God had pity upon the Brethren to their comfort lest they should have sorrow upon sorrow.

It was from his mouth that I received many of those good things concerning the virtues of the Brothers which I have written in this book as occasion demanded, although I have not expressly named him as having told me of them.

(5) Once he came to the Brothers at Mount St. Agnes, and speaking to some who were known to him, exhorted them to abide in the holy manner of life of the Order so as to go forward in virtue. By his virtuous character and gracious words I was greatly edified, for he stood there like some gentle lamb serene of countenance and with eyes looking steadfastly before him, not regarding the faces of them that stood by. After the happy departure of Florentius, who had appointed Amilius to be his successor in the governance of the House, he fell asleep in the Lord on the Vigil of the Feast of Saint Barnabas the Apostle, in the 1404th year of our Lord, having ruled the House well for four years and three months. He was buried next to Lubert in the Cemetery of St. Lebuin, on the south side of the Church not far from the Priest's Vestry.

AMILIUS OF BUREN

(6) *Amilius's Exhortation to the keeping of Brotherly Love.*

“ Hitherto have we continued, my most beloved brothers, ever united and in mutual charity, but now as it seemeth I am about to depart from you. Wherefore I do heartily entreat you that as ye have been fervent hitherto to keep that unity (for which be praise and glory to Christ), so ye maintain the same with steadfastness and perseverance; that in all things ye lovingly obey him to whom is committed the care of this House, even as ye would obey Christ and as hitherto ye have obeyed me, not considering his person, but Christ in him; for this cause think not the precepts he may give you to be evil, without reason, or contrary to your well-being, since it is not he that giveth them, but the Lord through him. Obey him therefore for Christ's sake and as if he were Christ Himself. Hasten to fulfil his precepts as though they were given from Heaven, for the Lord is not always pleased to reveal His will directly, or by miracles or by angels, but hath so ordained that we should know the same through a human deputy, whom we must obey in all his commands and precepts as we should obey the Lord Himself.

(7) “Therefore whatsoever duties or precepts of charity he layeth upon you, these fulfil with willing and cheerful minds, nor think that these things shall lack their fruit or hinder your devout exercises or your well-being; for a thousand such exercises are nothing compared to humility and the subjection that a man doth undergo willingly. So even if his commands should seem to be without reason, and like to be a great hindrance to you, both at the present and in the time to come,

THE LIFE OF

nevertheless pass no judgement thereupon, but always continue humbly in subjection, nothing judging. And as I have often said, look to Christ, not to the man in his own person; ye are not subject to him because of his own proper qualities, but ye submit for the sake of God, for your eternal salvation and progress, and for the Kingdom of Heaven. As ye have begun so continue to the end, passing no judgement upon your Father, but reverencing him deeply, and in all things humbly and cheerfully obeying him; think not within yourselves "we are as aged, as skilled, as learned, as wise as he," for ye are not put under him for his own sake but for Christ's, and for your own humiliation and safety, that ye may have recourse to him as to a father for protection and for counsel.

(8) "What is there between you and me, Brethren, save that ye have obeyed me for God's sake, and what between me and Florentius (or Gerard if I had been here with him) save that I obeyed him for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. Therefore everyone should think how he can humiliate and submit himself, and study to be contented whatever office is enjoined upon him, whether it be small or whether it be great; nor should any be wise in his own conceit, but rather think that whatsoever may have been ordained for him, that is the better for him. If any would be excused from any office saying that he is willing to give way in all else, but that he ought not to be degraded to such or such an office, I had rather cast him forth from the House than give him such exemption, because at some other time when his own will desired an office other than that assigned to him, he would be rebellious in this also. But in the matter of willingness to give way, let a man

AMILIUS OF BUREN

think of naught save Christ. Brethren, let us be, as it were, members one of another and each sustain the other, which if we do not, our estate shall quickly perish. Let us strive each in turn to keep Charity and Unity, and let every one seek to be as it were trodden under the foot of another and so no adversity shall have power to hurt us.


(9) "I know of nothing else to say to you save that which the Lord said to His disciples just before His Ascension, namely, that ye love one another even as Christ loved you, and that ye pray for me; and I, if I come to the Lord, will do whatsoever I can for you. In that I have often borne myself ill and have been a scandal to you, I pray you to forgive me; likewise for my negligence and the other many vices in which I have been entangled, all of which I would readily confess before you but that I fear lest some of you should be scandalized." So saying he put off his hood and besought pardon of the Brethren for his faults with compunction and all humility, and began to weep, seeing which the Brothers knelt and wept long and bitterly. These were the last words of Amilius which he spoke for the building up of mutual love and peace.

THE LIFE OF

LIFE OF JAMES OF VIANA

Concerning James of Viana

(1)

AMES of Viana, a man strong and wise in character, was endowed with much grace of humility, repentance and spiritual insight, so that he often sighed and wept for his daily failures, strictly examining himself thereupon. Likewise he charged against himself actions which another would praise in him, for in everything that he did he was fearful knowing that it must be weighed in the strict balance of the Judge on High, Who shall judge not open negligence only, but also the secret stains of the conscience. Far from his heart were proud thoughts of himself and the wish to be accounted good, for he desired to be lower than all and to give way even to those beneath him as though they were his betters. Amongst the writers he was eminent being diligent in the copying of books and in his care for them.

(2) When a young man sought to be instructed by him in spiritual exercises, James in his humility immediately confessed that he was slothful and a miserable sinner who had not yet really grasped the first principles of virtue; and he began to commend certain of the younger Brethren, saying that they were men of fervent spirit and understanding.

Upon another time the same youth being very sad told James of the distress of his heart, and desired to hear some word of comfort from him,

JAMES OF VIANA

and James spake kind and comfortable words to him, exhorting him to be patient and to wait humbly for the grace of God, because the good Lord is wont to be present with them that are contrite of heart, as saith the Psalmist, "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart Thy comforts have given joy to my soul"; and the young man being thus comforted, afterwards often remembered these words that are so sweet when any sorrow came upon him, for when the comfort of man faileth, one must flee to the Divine, and think how great Saints and the Elect also have sometimes suffered heaviness and desolation.

(3) So because James was a man of laudable life, and coveted to remain in the lowest rank and the simple condition of a Clerk, therefore by reason of his virtues and this notable gift of humility, he was promoted to the Priesthood by the good pleasure of God, and the counsel of Florentius and his Brethren. But this promotion was very grievous to him so that he wept bitterly when he knew that he must needs be ordained, for he confessed that he was too unworthy of such a rank, and he deemed that they who had given this counsel had greatly erred in that they had determined to promote an unfit person. But the more he abased himself the more pleasing was he to God and to the Brethren, and the more gladly did Florentius promote him; for at that time the Priesthood was a thing rare and precious amongst the Devout, because none dared to accept that office save one that was righteous and compelled thereto for the Common good, for all avoided higher station and chose to abide in a lower room and a lowlier office. Wherefore Florentius, him-

THE LIFE OF

self a gem of the Priesthood, is reported once to have said, "If I were not a priest and had not the care of others I might be able wholly to amend myself, for higher place doth often cause disturbances of mind from which a good man that is under governance and liveth without the care of external things is the more free."

(4) Once when he wished to meditate upon his failures, James secretly climbed up to the sollar of the House, and with heavy sighs wrote down his faults upon a Tablet so that he might not forget anything that he thought he ought to confess.

When one asked him of the manner of life of the House, he said, "If any would live with us it is needful that he abase himself and make himself less than all. Such an one hath here a Paradise and is abundantly content." Florentius used sometimes to reprove him and recall him from the unmeasured heaviness of his compunction, lest by too great severity he should exceed the bounds of prudence, and he bore the reproof patiently, greatly humbling himself for that he had gone forward somewhat imprudently. The fervency of his spirit surpassed the strength of his body, but his good intention was his excuse, for the end thereof was to seek after God. After this he fell into bodily sickness, and his strength failing him by little and little, he died during the lifetime of Florentius, that is, on the day following the Feast of St. Gregory the Pope, to whom he was specially devoted, and in the year of the Lord 1400. He was buried with his Brethren in the cemetery of the great church that is dedicated to St. Lebuin.

JOHN CACABUS

LIFE OF JOHN CACABUS

☞ *Concerning John Cacabus, called in the vulgar tongue, Ketel, an humble cook*

(1)



HERE was an humble servant of Christ in the House of Florentius named John Ketel, to whom were assigned the duties of the kitchen. This man, despising all worldly things, chose the path of holy poverty on earth, that in Heaven he might have part in the eternal riches with the Saints; and for his works of mercy and charity, his reward was to enter into everlasting felicity.

Long ago he was very well known to me in the days when I resorted oft to Deventer, and he showed such humility in his manner of life, and the example which he gave, that he preached contempt of the world by his deeds more than by his words. Yet his discourse was no vain thing when he spake of God, for he persuaded his hearers that all temporal greatness is contemptible and that no labour undertaken for the love of Christ should be abhorred. But who could tell worthily the virtues of this man? and yet charity doth demand that I speak a few words that this pearl buried in the Lord's field may not be hidden too long, but may be brought forth to the light for the edification of many.

(2) His native town was Duseborch, which lies in the Countship of Marck, not far from Wesel, and near the course of the Rhine. His mother

THE LIFE OF

Christina, following her son's footsteps, ended her days in the House of the Sisters at Deventer. That son had been at first a trader in the regions of Flanders and Holland, but his fixed abode was at Dordrecht with the merchants that trafficked by sea. He often had the good inspiration to serve God, but knew not how to make a beginning, nor by what way to travel to the fulfilment of his desire, and when he had long continued in the successful conduct of his worldly business, at length being inspired by better counsels, he thought to put away the deceits of this world, and the heavy yoke of the service thereof, and to turn his will to fulfilling the Office of the Priesthood so as to serve God in more honourable wise in that state of life. Therefore on this account he put aside his worldly traffick, and hearing of the repute of the Devout Clerks at Deventer, he came thither to visit the School with certain other men of good purpose. He had already gained some knowledge of Latin, so as to be able to understand the Scripture, and when he saw the holy conversation of Florentius and his brothers, he was changed into another man, and together with many others was fired with a desire to renounce the world. He left following the rules of Alexander and Donatus, and entered into the School where spiritual exercises are taught, so as to learn the Will of God in the House of Florentius, where many were gathered together and served Christ, being founded in humility and made fast in holy Charity.

(3) He was instant in his request to serve the Brothers in the kitchen that so long as he lived he might, in that humble condition, offer a service pleasing to God. So after many prayers he was admitted on probation, and putting aside his

JOHN CACABUS

secular garb he was clad in an old habit, and a linen apron that was suited to the defilements of cooking; but he rejoiced more to be clad in such a garment than he would had he been robed in the Priestly stole; and he became a pattern of humility and lowliness to all who were in the House, giving himself up wholly to mortification for the Love of the Crucified Lord. The fame of his good conversation went forth to the ears of men without, and many that had high place marvelled that he who had been formerly a wealthy merchant, now had become a poor cook and an humble Brother. For though he had once designed to climb by the ladder of learning to the dignity of a Priest of the Church, he did afterwards put aside all desire for the pinnacle of honour and the pride of dignity, and sought the lowest room, thus imitating Christ Who humbled Himself and taking upon Him the form of a servant, ministered to His disciples.

(4) While he had continued in the world he had prepared him certain priestly vestments adorned in costly wise, and having designs inwoven in golden thread. So gorgeous were they that the bishop of a cathedral, or a ruling abbot, might have been honoured in the wearing of them. But now being informed to his soul's health by the Spirit of God, John put aside and rejected all of these, and selling to others his chasuble and silken cope, vested himself in vile rags, a dark tunic and a gray cloak, being purposed to serve in the kitchen. And for this he returned hearty thanks to God that He had called him to this ministry, and had not allowed him to perish with the multitude in the world, wherefore he sometimes said to the Brothers with great cheerfulness of heart,

THE LIFE OF

“Am I not become a great Priest and Prelate? for twice every day I administer communion to the Brothers”; by which parable he signified that he prepared their meal both morning and evening and so renewed Christ in the person of each one of the Brothers.

(5) He was often found praying on bended knee before the kitchen fire, and while his hands held the cooking vessels his mouth poured forth devout Psalms. He made the kitchen an house of prayer, for he knew that God is everywhere, and the material fire was to him a flame whereat to kindle the fervour of his spirit. During his labours he would murmur melodiously the hymns that he had heard sung in Church, and thus bearing God in mind, he was outwardly busied with his cooking, but inwardly at leisure to meditate of heavenly things, for he passed no time unfruitfully, nor for a moment neglected his spiritual exercises. He was diligent to prepare food for the Brothers in due time and carefully, for he was the master cook, but yet he provided nothing superfluous, and gave to others the better meats, keeping the commoner for himself.

He chose three Saints above others for his own special devotion, namely, St. Alexius, who for a long while hid himself in his father's house in the garb of a stranger, and patiently bore much contumely from his own family; St. Francis, who loved poverty, and would have no earthly possessions in this world; and St. Elizabeth the widow, who being filled with the bowels of mercy, distributed all her goods to the poor and despised all worldly riches and honours as dross.

(6) Once he was speaking with his companions concerning holy poverty, and so fervent

JOHN CACABUS

was the sound of his words that by his bearing and the transfiguration of his countenance one would have thought that he was all on fire within.

On a holy day when certain Clerks from the School had come to see him, he began to speak good words to them, and amongst other things said, "Well do we find it written in the Gospel, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven,' but nowhere do we find it written therein, 'Blessed are the Masters in Arts.'" And his hearers marvelling at the novelty of his words, received them with much reverence; likewise he explained his saying to them on the ground that knowledge without humility profiteth not, but, that in truth the Kingdom of God is attained by poverty of spirit, that is, by humility; for this virtue doth gain favour from God now, and Eternal Life in the time to come. He was very good and pitiful in feeding the poor, particularly such as desired to serve God; and when some said that they got but little by begging in the streets, he marvelled that many rich men were so churlish and did not give liberally to the poor although without much loss to themselves they might practise works of mercy, and receive exceeding great rewards from God.

(7) One day therefore he and another who was chosen to be his companion disguised themselves as beggars and went forth, when it was already late in the day, to beg bread, wishing to prove the truth of what these poor men had said. And John Ketel cried before the doors and said, "Give somewhat for God's Sake to a poor stranger who would fain be in Jerusalem." By this he meant not that Jerusalem on earth which slew Christ and the Prophets, but the Fatherland Above whose

THE LIFE OF

inhabitants are the Saints and Angels of God; for that country the poor stranger John did sigh, being for the time far off in the body from the Heavenly Jerusalem, though in his soul he drew nearer to Her every day. Now a certain Clerk who was in his house, hearing this cry, arose quickly to open the door and know who this stranger might be, and running after him he asked, saying, "Who art thou that dost make this petition?" But John held his peace for he would not be known, but afterward yielding to that other's importunity, he said, "It is I," and the Clerk knowing his voice answered "Art thou John Ketel? and now dost thou beg thy bread? what is the cause hereof?" John therefore said to him, "Hold thy peace and question me no further upon the matter for the cause is pious and good." So the Clerk returned to his house and told it to them of his household, saying, "Very marvellous is the sight that I have seen. John Ketel, the cook of Florentius' house, doth beg bread from door to door." And his hearers marvelled, and signed themselves with the sign of the Cross, saying, "What doth that good man mean?" and thus communing with one another, they were greatly edified by the example of John and privately told this which he had done to certain others. But John returned to the house, and most joyfully carried into the kitchen the broken meats which had been given him as alms, and showed to Florentius and the Brothers the blessing he had received, namely, the holy bread which he had begged for God's sake. And Florentius rejoiced over the devotion of his humble cook and said, "Give us a share of thine alms," and John answered: "Gladly will I give you a part hereof to

JOHN CACABUS

eat; but I would in exchange give some of our own bread to the poor, for they ought not to lose what is their own but rather to receive an increase." Then some of the bread that was begged was put before the Brothers for their meal, and John took some whole loaves from the buttery to give to the poor for God's sake, as was commanded him, and there was great joy in the House over this matter.

(8) One morning he went forth to a place near the Fishgate to draw water from the river, and as he was entering into a boat that belonged to one of the fishers so as to reach the clean water, the owner came up and said, "What doest thou here, get thee gone quickly from my boat." And John bore patiently the words of him that chode him, and gave up his design to draw water lest he might offend the man. But then the fisher saw that John was an holy Brother and was about to depart without a word, so being moved with compassion he said, "Come hither to me and give me thy pitcher." Then he drew water and gave John the pitcher again saying, "Go in peace," and John returned thanks to his benefactor, and carried back the pitcher full of water, praying devoutly upon the way, for this was ever his custom when he went forth upon any business.

(9) Florentius knowing that John was a virtuous man and strong in spirit to bear adversity often chode him for negligence, and blamed him for matters in which he was not really blameworthy. And this Florentius did to prove his patience and to set him up as a pattern for others.

Thus when there were men knocking at the window of the kitchen, and others standing at the door John hastened to answer each one severally

THE LIFE OF

according to his proper need: and as he was running hither and thither Florentius knocked upon the table with his hand as if he had need of something; but John being fully occupied delayed a little to answer; so the good Father said with a serious air to prove him, "How long shall I sit here waiting for thee?" to which the good cook replied meekly, "My most beloved Master here am I and will bring thee what thou wilt; I pray thee pardon my tardiness." Sometimes also Florentius said to him, "How is it that this food hath such an ill savour, knowest thou not how to cook better? Mayhap the Brothers will murmur because they must eat thine ill-dressed food." But John listening patiently to the rebuke, and confessing himself negligent replied, "I will gladly amend myself," and Florentius answered, "Thou dost often say so, yet thou dost make too small improvement."

(10) At another time as Florentius was passing through the kitchen John came behind him and kneeling down took hold on the hem of his garment, asking pardon; and Florentius, looking down upon him said: "What is it now?" and John answered, "I have spilled some wine from a cask in the cellar"; then said Florentius yet more sternly, "It is thus that thou dost waste our substance, now breaking something, now spilling something else," and straightway he turned away his face and shut the kitchen door, leaving the cook upon his knees; but John bearing all humbly arose from the ground making no complaint of this treatment as though he had suffered injury, but holding the holy Father who had chidden him for his good in the highest esteem. In these and in many other ways Florentius often proved John,

JOHN CACABUS

and yet he loved him with an especial love and honoured him with all his heart for his faithfulness and love of poverty, a matter whereon the two did oft hold commune in the kitchen.

Though he had no great knowledge of letters, yet had he a good ability to understand the Scriptures, knowledge to discern prudently between vice and virtue, and to give effectual remedies to the troubled and the tempted.

(11) When he had leisure from his toil he rejoiced to read in some holy book, not so as to become more learned in the knowledge that puffeth up, but so as to return to his work more fervent in charity. He listened with diligence to the reading at table, for he gathered much from few words, and his virtue of obedience and frequent meditations upon the benefits that God had given him supplied that which the deep sayings of a discourse in Latin denied to him: wherefore he studied lovingly the life of our Lord Jesus Christ, drawing therefrom a rule for every part of his own life; and for His love he embraced the lowest calling, coarser food and poorer clothing.

Sometimes he read the book of John Climacus, "On perfect renunciation of the world and mortification of the Will," and expounded therefrom sentiments full of spiritual truth, so that wise men marvelled that he had so good an understanding of the book.

(12) A few days before his death he was asked to say whether he knew of aught in the house that should be amended, because the Brethren would gladly amend themselves, and he made answer as a true lover of poverty, saying, "I would desire that we should amend in three things. First, that we should eat more sparingly and that

THE LIFE OF

more should be given to the poor; secondly, that our more precious ornaments should be sold and the price thereof be bestowed in like manner; thirdly, that since we have many books some of these should be sold, and only those that are necessary retained, and that by this means the poor should be the better relieved."

To these words Florentius, rejoicing over his devotion and his compassionate spirit, replied, "John, that which thou sayest is very good."

While he was sick certain poor clerks came to visit him, and looking upon them with eyes full of pity, he said, "Oh! my beloved poor, henceforward I shall not be able to give you anything, but I commend you to God that He may provide for you in every good thing." Amongst his other exercises in humility he had the following custom: on every Sabbath he would clothe him in a long linen robe or shroud to remind him of death and in this garment he would cook on that day. Moreover, he earnestly entreated that he might be buried therein after his death, and this was done, for Matthias of Mecklin who was his comrade, let wash this robe that John might be buried in it even as he had desired. So when the time drew near that this John, our cook and God's servant, who was filled with many a fruit of virtue, should depart from this life, he fell sick just before the octave of the Feast of Pentecost, being smitten with an imposthume, and began to set himself in order for his approaching departure.

(13) But before his weakness grew upon him, he of his obedience and charity, began once more to take charge of poor clerks and the sick, being desirous to visit them and to provide carefully for their necessities, which thing did yet further in-

JOHN CACABUS

crease his desert. But herein he was prevented by his weakness, and he was wondrously consoled by the sweetness of the Presence of Christ Who visited him. For one day Amilius, who faithfully attended him in his sickness and ministered continually to him, came very early in the morning to visit him, asking whether he wished for aught; and then John assenting thereto he went into the church to hear Mass. But when the service was ended he returned to the sick man who asked him, "Wilt thou of thy charity share with me the benefits of the Mass which thou hast heard"; and Amilius answered, "Gladly do I give and assign all to thee in charity, dear Brother," to which John replied, "My Brother, whilst thou wert gone our Lord Jesus Christ hath deigned to visit me," and Amilius hearing this said, "Tell me, I pray, when did He depart?" and John answered, "The moment thou didst open the door He vanished." So Amilius rejoiced and blessed God, giving Him thanks, and afterward he told me fully all that was done.

(14) Satan also strove to deceive and affright the servant of God, saying thus to him, "Take thy purse again, foul merchant! Thinkest thou that thou canst buy the Kingdom of Heaven with thy money?" But the humble John, understanding the malice of the enemy, said secretly in his heart, "I presume not to rely upon mine own merits, but upon the mercy of God and the merits of the saints." And so the enemy was put utterly to confusion and departed from him, and John did commit himself in faith to the Divine mercy; and being a faithful servant of Christ turned himself yet more closely to prayer, and ruminated upon these words amongst other songs of

THE LIFE OF

psalmody, "The Lord looseth them that are fettered, the Lord enlighteneth the blind." Amilius, who sat by his pallet, bowed down his ear to hear something more from the lips of one that was in the very agony of death, that he might record the same as a good memorial of him; but he could understand nothing because of the hoarseness of the weak voice.

(15) At length after a long death agony wherein he strove laboriously against the might of death, he breathed forth the breath of his life amid the devout prayers of the Brothers who had come together, and so made a blessed end of a life completed in the service of Christ. He died in the year of the Lord 1398, on the fourth Sunday after Pentecost, which day was the Feast of St. Petronilla the Virgin. His poor body was buried in the cemetery pertaining to St. Lebuin's Church, where also divers Brethren who died after him rest in peace, to be raised again through Christ upon the Last Day, together with all the faithful. Praise and glory be to Christ for a man so devout as was this humble cook, who, after a short course of years and but little toil, had allotted to him in heaven, as we piously believe, the greatest of rewards. Concerning him the venerable Father John Huesden, Prior at Windesheim, has borne worthy testimony, saying, "Would that it might be my lot to live with such a man and to die in like state even as he died!"

*Here beginneth the Book of the devout exercises of
this same Brother John*

(16) What can I render to Thee, O God Eternal, for all the benefits that thou hast rendered unto me?

JOHN CACABUS

O! my beloved John, have pity upon thyself, and with much diligence and all thy strength ponder over thy past life; think what thou wert in thy worldly days, nay, what thou art even yet and what are thy deserts. Think upon the inestimable goodness of our Beloved Lord Jesus Christ which He hath shown in fuller measure to thee than to so many; remember, therefore, that His judgement shall be more heavy upon thee than upon those others, except thou amend thyself. Stand in awe and think that though in His so great kindness He hath spared thee, yet perhaps He may not will to spare thee any longer. Keep in thine heart this thought that to-day—or at furthest to-morrow—thou must die, and then whither shalt thou go?

(17) Woe is me, oh God Eternal! whither shall I flee from the face of Thy wrath, for my sins are more in number than the sands of the sea; yet know I in very truth that nought is so displeasing to Thee as despair, and that Thou desirest not the death of a sinner but his repentance.

For this cause, say unto God with groaning of heart: "Oh! immeasurable goodness of God, look upon me a miserable sinner; oh! mercy all embracing turn Thee unto me that am a man full of iniquity. Behold! I that am desolate, come to the Almighty; wounded I haste to the Physician.

"O Thou Who hast stayed so long the sword of vengeance, continue Thine accustomed goodness, and according to the multitude of Thy mercies blot out the count of mine offences."

There are also many other thoughts upon which thou mayest ponder concerning the mercy of God, as His mercy to David, St. Peter, St. Paul, Mary

THE LIFE OF

Magdalene, the Publicans, and many other sinners. For it is clearly manifest throughout the whole life of Christ, how pitiful He was to penitents who came to Him; and in regard to them He weighed not the multitude of their sins but the greatness of their love. (18) Wherefore, if I would reach that love, then it is above all things necessary for me to consider mine own frailty, and truly to feel that I can do no good thing of myself. Likewise I must keep the greatness of God and His faithfulness continually before mine eyes, together with mine own littleness and unfaithfulness towards Him. In this there are many things to be considered, and if I give right heed to them the consideration thereof shall lead me to make myself subject to all men, to despise myself even as also I should desire to be despised. But these exercises must be conducted truly and with careful thought, and one must constantly invoke the help of the Lord from Whom must come the power to perform such exercises.

If therefore I would reach that state of humility and that love, it is needful for me to have a daily exercise and rule to lead me to these things. And so, according as Saints have said, I must look to my past sins, keep them ever before mine eyes and make all endeavour to weigh them. To do this will keep me in subjection and humility, and I shall not think the defects of the Brothers and other men to be heavy, nor shall I judge them lightly, but have compassion upon them, and lead them to better things.

Wherefore it is expedient for me to strive to this end, and to beware of searching curiously into the deeds or words of others; to avoid detraction, and if I hear any such thing to strive to

JOHN CACABUS

find excuses, putting the matter aside and casting it away.

This also will help me greatly, namely, to consider the virtues of my Brethren, of whom I believe that the greater number have never committed mortal sin. On the other hand, I must think upon the greatness of mine own sins, so shall I find that I am not worthy to live amongst the Brethren nor to serve them, and I must hold them in reverence and hope that through their good works and prayers I may reach Life Eternal.

Likewise it is needful for me to have the Presence of God before mine eyes at all times, and daily to strive inwardly to have good thoughts during my work, and in everything to imitate with a single heart that most worthy Pattern, namely, the Life of our Lord Jesus Christ, His humility, His patience, His contempt of the world and poverty, but, above all, His charity.

Also, I must strive greatly to look upon every man as the image of God and so to deal with all my work as if I were doing it unto Christ; this will greatly lighten my toil and make me benevolent to everyone.

I will strive also to recite my prayers attentively without haste, often in my work and labour to bow my knee, and pray awhile briefly but with attention.

Every morning at the third hour when thou hearest the bell, thou oughtest to rise without delay and straightway begin to meditate upon some holy subject, giving thanks for the mercy of God; remember thine own misery, and that God, the Angels, and the Saints are there with thee.

Be careful what thou readest and with whom thou dost converse.

Kneel down or sit decorously without accidie

THE LIFE OF

or leaning to one side or the other, and always bear thyself thus when thou dost pray.

When Mattins or Prime are over, read the Holy Scripture, and if thou art heavy with sleep write down something from the subject of thy study. When the fifth hour doth sound do whatsoever thou hast to do in the kitchen, and if there is nothing there, shut up the kitchen and bind some books, or if anything hath been committed to thee, do it until it is time to go into the kitchen.

When the bell doth ring for Mass, read the first part of Tierce as far as the Psalms while thou art still in the House, and continue to read the remainder on thy way as thou goest to Church. Kneel upright upon thy knees in Church in some corner during the whole of Mass; and after thy usual custom meditate upon the Life and Passion of our Beloved Lord Jesus Christ.

When Mass is done begin whilst thou art still in Church to read Sext as far as the Psalms, and read the rest upon thy homeward way. When thou hast returned to the kitchen from Church pray awhile, determine in thine heart how thou wouldest order thyself during the day, and what are the points in which thou oughtest to amend thyself; then strive steadfastly to this end, keeping before thine eyes (as was said before) that Divine Mirror of the Life and Character of our beloved Lord, and remembering that it is to Him and not to men that thou art ministering.

In the midst of thy work and labour thou oughtest to say often and attentively some brief prayer upon thy bended knees, especially at the ringing of the Bell, and when the signal soundeth in the Church to announce the Elevation of the Holy Body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

JOHN CACABUS

Constantly constrain thyself in the midst of thy work to have some good thought, as, for example, the benefits of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Judgement, or Death: and when anyone doth knock at the kitchen door look to it that thou give a good answer.

If thou hast time study awhile in the book of extracts which thou hast copied.

Whomsoever of the Brothers thou seest either within or outside the House, look upon him as upon Christ, having special regard for those who have the care of the House, and if they require aught of thee do it quickly and with a cheerful countenance.

Before beginning a meal read the Benedicite, and during thy meal be instant to read or to meditate upon something that is good.

Take heed lest thou eat too hastily, or partake of delicate meats or drinks; be not longer at the table than are the Brethren, and during the meal, if any one of those who serve the table doth knock at the door, arise quickly. After the meal thou must provide for the Reader the hot victual like that which the Brothers have had. Meanwhile, read the Grace and put away the remnants of the food, and the cooking vessels each in his own place, as quickly as thou canst. When thou comest to thy cell after dinner, immediately read Nones and then do thy work and labour with the lay Brothers until the second bell for Vespers, unless thou hast some other duty in the House or abroad. After this read thy Vespers. If thou hast further time to spend meditate upon or study some holy subject until the fourth hour, and then go to the kitchen to prepare supper for the Brothers; after this meal prepare for the follow-

THE LIFE OF

ing day such food as the sick or the Brethren may require. When thy business in the kitchen is done go to thy cell and read Compline, after which thou mayest study or do any good thing until the eighth hour, at which time thou oughtest to write down thy failures and to meditate piously upon some holy matter, to say some prayer with invocation of the Saints, and having such thoughts in mind to go to bed about the ninth hour endeavouring to fall asleep while yet meditating upon holy things.

When thou dost awake let thy thoughts dwell straightway upon some holy matter, that thou mayst be able to sleep again with such things still in mind.

Before all these things I ought to prefer obedience; and it is my desire, whatsoever the rulers of the House may order (though their decision agree not with mine own ideas) to abandon mine own will without hesitation in these matters, to do at once whatsoever they desire, and not to hold to anything or to any task with inordinate affection; for if I abstain from so doing I shall the more easily abandon mine own will.

Furthermore I ought to strive to hold in reverence and honour those who are the Guardians and Procurators of the House: to take all heed not to harbour harsh thoughts and suspicions of them, to perform dutifully and without reserve all that they desire, not judging or seeking to inquire the reasons for which they order this or that; to keep mine own foolishness clearly before mine eyes, remembering that I am not wise, and to think their wisdom great.

Of a surety also I must keep before mine eyes the fact that I have resigned myself to these

JOHN CACABUS

Superiors as being in the place of God, and so am not mine own, although I have bound myself to this obedience not by vow but of my own free and untrammelled will and purpose, and this have I done in the hope that it is wholesome for me so to stand rather than to act according to mine own judgement and pleasure; therefore I desire to think upon this purpose of mine, and earnestly to entreat my Superiors to keep me in subjection.

Moreover I must strive in all my works, words, and thoughts to fear God rather than man, that whatsoever I do it may be solely to the honour of God and to please Him only; in like manner whatever trespass I commit I must fear therein the offence I give to God more than that I give to men. In very truth I must keep myself from boasting, from the desire of outward show and from the love of praise from men.

(19) Also I must strive mightily to keep silence, for this shall be a notable aid to many virtues. I will strive when I speak to do so prudently; to say one "Ave Maria" in the interval before I speak, or reply; not to exaggerate: to avoid loose talk and the use of many or high-sounding words, especially in the kitchen; and to be careful to admonish others in this regard.

I must earnestly endeavour to be alone whenever I can, to put on my spiritual armour, never to be idle on any account, and to avoid speaking or listening to defamatory talk. In the office assigned to thee be diligent to preserve the outward appearance of order; be obedient in the performance of thy duties and show thyself to be kindly to every man, especially by providing food for the sick, particularly for our Father Florentius, who is almost always weak and sickly.

THE LIFE OF

I resolve to be benevolent to all strangers, receiving them as I would Christ, but not talking much with them; to look well to the care of the poor, and to do all that is entrusted to me so far as in me lies, namely, to hold them in reverence, to show them kindness, and to keep ward faithfully over the goods entrusted to me.

(20) When I go abroad on business I will strive to keep watch over mine eyes, to read some good book or to meditate while in the streets, and to return homeward as quickly as may be. Also I will endeavour to make known my temptations; and at least once in the week to lament over my sins to some one person, to accept the remedies that he proposeth, rejecting none, and to endeavour always to admit my guilt; and if I break anything, or neglect any duty, I desire to ask pardon therefore freely.

Also I would abstain from too often tasting the food before it is sent up, save in case of need; from drinking (save at meal times) without leave from my Superiors; and from doing anything behind their backs that I would not dare to do before their faces.

I ought to strive earnestly to perform all despised and humble tasks and to relieve our Brothers Matthew and John thereof whenever I can do so, to hold them in reverence, to show myself kindly to them and prompt to aid in every humble task.

(21) I will beware that no complaint be heard from me of my clothing, my food, and the like; but I will strive rather to feel that I am unworthy of those things which I lack; it is my duty also to read diligently such books as may help me to this end, to give my whole attention to the attain-

JOHN CACABUS

ment thereof, to strive to order myself modestly, whether I am walking, standing, sitting, or the like.

It is also profitable to me to esteem the spiritual exercises of this House more highly than those of other Houses, to have a great love for my work in the kitchen, a full resolve to die in this condition, and not to depart from it by reason of anything that may come to me save only in virtue of the rule of obedience.

In this I must have all confidence towards our most loving Lord, namely that He is ready to forgive all my sins, and to give me freely mine own proper reward for everything I do, however small it be.

And though there are many other tasks greater and holier, yet I must not leave mine own work, but remain constant thereunto, being assured that for me no task is more wholesome or more profitable than that to which the Lord hath called me.

Besides these things it is my desire to examine myself daily after the eighth hour in all matters of this kind, to ascertain that in which I have trespassed, and (as I hope), to resolve firmly to amend myself surely therein for the time to come.

THE LIFE OF

LIFE OF ARNOLD OF SCHOONHOVEN

Concerning Arnold of "Schoonhoven" (that is, "Bellæ Curia"), a devout Clerk

(1)



IN the days when the Church at Deventer flourished through the presence there of that Reverend Father Florentius, and many scholars came to that city from divers regions desiring to be taught, there came also from the country of Holland a youth whose natural disposition was good, and in whom was no worldly malice. His name was Arnold, and he was the son of one Wyrone, a faithful man and an honourable citizen of Schoonhoven. While Arnold was still in his parent's house, and attended the School with the boys that were his comrades, he followed not the ways of those that sported in the streets, but it was his custom to enter the Church in the morning and there to offer his prayers and vows to God before the several Altars, giving up his heart betimes in the day to the Lord Who made him. The first beginnings of a boyhood so devout contained the promise of that fuller grace which he should earn when he came to man's estate; for God shielded him that he continued untouched by the contagion of the flesh. As I have said, he came to Deventer, where at that time Master John Boheme was in authority, and he presented himself before the face of Florentius, hoping to obtain a lodging in one of the Houses of the Devout Clerks. At that time

ARNOLD OF SCHOONHOVEN

there was no small number of these Clerks living in the several Houses under the rule and discipline of that most devout Father, and following the holy commandments of their Lord, His counsels and precepts, and also at set times toiling at the work of copying books for the Schools.

(2) So Florentius, perceiving that Arnold was earnestly disposed to the service of God and wholly turned away from the world, gave him leave to abide in his own ancient House wherein dwelt divers Clerks, about twenty in all, living at the common charge, having a common table and expenditure, and serving God with great devotion. Amongst their number were three lay Brothers, of whom one was the Procurator, who bought all things necessary for the Community, the second was over the kitchen, and the third mended the clothes. In after days some of the Brethren from this House passed into the order of Canons Regular; others attained the Priestly rank, and by reason of the good examples which they had seen and learned at Deventer, bore fruit in other places.

(3) At this same time, by the aid and counsel of Florentius, I also took up my abode in this house, and continued in the Community for about a year, having Arnold as my companion, for we were content to share one little cell and bed. Here indeed I learned to write, to read the Holy Scripture and books on moral subjects, and to hear devout discourses; but it was chiefly through the sweet conversation of the Brethren that I was inspired yet more strongly to despise the world; and by the pious admonitions of Arnold I was holpen and instructed every day. All that I was then able to earn by writing I gave for the ex-

THE LIFE OF

penses of the Community, and what I lacked, the generous piety of my beloved Father Florentius defrayed for me, for he succoured me in every way like a father.

(4) Thus I noted in Arnold many signs of devotion, for he was altogether exemplary and devout both in the House and the School, not hurtful or harsh to any, but acceptable and kindly unto all. Every morning at the fourth hour when the Bell gave warning, he awoke instantly and arose with alacrity, and then, before the bed on bended knees, he said a short prayer, fervently pouring forth the first fruits of his mouth to the Lord. After dressing himself quickly, he went in due time to the Oratory to recite the morning Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Holy Cross, and he did not keep the others waiting but was instant to arrive before them all.

When it was time to go to Mass he hastened to be amongst the first in Church and humbly bowed the knee before the Altars, hearing the Office of the Mass with the reverence of a suppliant, and ceasing not from prayer and holy meditation until the solemn rites were finished in due order. He loved to choose a private place far from the crowd so that he might not be hindered in his prayers, and the more private his place the more fervent were his supplications. He avoided to be seen of men lest in any way he might become conspicuous by his devotion, and likewise he took care that his voice might not be heard abroad, for his desire was to open his heart in private prayer to God only; but yet his burning light could not always be thus hidden nor hindered from shining abroad though he were fain to hide it.

ARNOLD OF SCHOONHOVEN

(5) Thus it sometimes happened that though he wist not of it, I stood by and noted secretly what he did, and was set on fire by his fervour in prayer, for I desired that I too might sometimes feel a devotion like to that which he seemed to feel every day. Nor was it wonderful that one who kept careful ward over his heart and lips wherever he went, should be devout in prayer, for the sound of joy was heard from his mouth by reason of the most sweet savour of his devotion, as if he were partaking of delectable food, according to that saying of the Psalmist: "The high praises of God shall be in their lips." As he sat with the boys in School he noted not their childish clamour, but as the Master delivered his lecture he wrote the same on paper and afterward read it over to himself or with a comrade, thereby avoiding vain talk; for he did not betake himself to worldly employments, but when the lectures were done he read awhile in the Holy Page, and often prayed silently or sighed inwardly; for in his studies he sought God above all else. When he found aught that was especially noteworthy, he of his charity showed it to the comrade who was with him or gave him the passage to read, and thus by the Sacred word and by his holy discourse he turned many away from scurrilous talk and laughter. On Feast Days when many persons came to the town, he brought not a few to the House of Florentius to hear his discourse, not regarding their age or condition, but rejoicing over them and hoping for the conversion of some; and through the inspiration of God he was not disappointed of his desire, for he saw the fruit of his labours in the amending of the lives of these worldlings, both young and old.

THE LIFE OF

His discourse and exhortation dealt not with lofty matters nor with things foreign to the purpose in hand, but with true conversion to God and the amendment of life in the world; and the holy simplicity of his devout words was more profitable than the subtility of a Latin discourse.

(6) When he seemed to be sufficiently advanced in learning he occupied himself wholly with spiritual studies, deserting those of the Schools; he forgot his parents, his home, and his country for the sake of Life Eternal, and submitted himself most readily to the yoke of obedience and to the discipline of the Clerks, as was the laudable custom first instituted by our Father Florentius in that ancient House. He toiled not greatly to attain much learning, but rather to preserve a good conscience and purity of heart, for he knew that the pure in heart are blessed and most pleasing to God. He began to be instant and earnest in his prayers to be allowed to abide all the days of his life in the House of Florentius, for there was no other state of life in the whole world that he would choose save that in which he could pass his days with the Brothers who were so devout and worthy to be accepted of God, beneath a strict rule and in obedience to the most reverend Father of the House. At this time those disciples and most devout pupils of our beloved Father Florentius, whose lives I have written above, were still in the flesh, namely, Lubert, Henry, Gerard, Amilius, James and John Ketel, and there were with them some others who had been amongst the first members of that Community. These were fervent in the love of Christ, and let their light shine as an ensample to their neighbours, and the beloved Brother Arnold desired to be knit

ARNOLD OF SCHOONHOVEN

to them in humble fellowship and sincerity of life, for he knew that his should be a happy fortune if he should be thought worthy to spend the whole space of his mortal life with these Florentian Brothers that lived the life of Chastity on earth. But though he was importunate in his prayers Florentius delayed to grant his petition so that he might have a better probation, and he spake to him in this wise: "Learn to write well and then there may be hope for thee."

(7) Hearing this he expended all diligence in learning the art of writing, and often went to some skilful writer, asking to be more fully instructed by him; and he said to me: "Would that I could write well that I might the sooner dwell with our Father Florentius! I believe that through God's grace I should have a good will to overcome my passions if only I knew how to write." When I heard this I marvelled at his righteousness and fervour, in that he endeavoured with all his might to do what Florentius had bidden him, and I transposed his saying and thought in my heart: "I should have a good will to learn writing if only I could amend my life."

But Arnold had a special grace from God which instructed him in every good work so that no matter of obedience seemed hard to him, and this grace he strove to nurture with holy exercises and to preserve with anxious prayer lest it might be imputed to him that he had received God's grace in vain. Therefore, before he read or began to write, he said a short prayer making his work an offering to God, and at the end thereof he did the same, returning thanks to Him. When he went forth from the House or returned to his

THE LIFE OF

cell, he bowed the knee before the Image of Christ, and so with prayer and obeisance he went about his business.

(8) Every hour when the Bell rang he said an Ave Maria or some similar invocation, and while he was still attending School, if he saw the door of the Church open before or after school-time, he gladly entered and remained there so long as time allowed, or at least made a reverence toward the Church. The pious customs that were enjoined by his Elders he carefully observed and did not knowingly omit even the least of them. He accepted the admonitions given him with gratitude, be the matter never so slight, and earnestly strove to amend. He received every word spoken by the Superior or his vicar as humbly as if he had heard the same from the mouth of God, or of some Saint, but he ventured not to discriminate or judge by interpreting the order otherwise than as it was given. For these things' sake he had great peace of heart and was dear alike to God and man, being willing and ready to do all that was commanded him as one that rejoiceth ever in the Lord.

(9) Before the Festivals of Christ and the Saints he was instant and zealous to prepare himself for the Holy Communion, and he used to say: "A great Feast is at hand, therefore let us prepare ourselves devoutly to receive the Lord"; or, again: "To-day is the Feast of such a Saint, let us earnestly implore his suffrages."

(10) When a certain youth was speaking with Florentius of the vice of vainglory and asking for a remedy therefor, Arnold, who was passing by, came upon them, and Florentius seeing him said to the youth: "What sayest thou of that Brother

ARNOLD OF SCHOONHOVEN

yonder? Is he also vainglorious?" To which the youth answered: "I trow not"; and Florentius said: "I wit well that it is as thou sayest."

So when the fulfilment of his desire had been delayed for about a year, and having been proved sufficiently, he had still continued constant, longing with all his heart to be allowed to join the Brotherhood, Florentius yielded to his petition and accepted him, giving him a place amid the Brethren; this was a thing most joyful to him, and he returned hearty thanks to God therefor. Then as though he were converted anew and called to a more perfect state, he strove so zealously after an earnest and humble conversation, as to become to all a pattern of virtue and utter subjection; he let slip no whit of that primitive devotion and those good customs which were handed down to him by the former Brethren of the House; he apprehended the discipline with all his heart, exercising himself in virtue and daily renewing himself therein according to the saying of the Apostle: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind." He shook off all sluggishness from him, being ever ready to watch and pray, diligent in his writing and in admonishing the negligent piously and with charity, being led thereto by godly zeal.

(11) There seemed to dwell in him no will other than that of his Superior whose deeds and words he magnified, and embraced humbly, as if they proceeded from heaven, and thus he continued like an innocent child in obedience and subjection, not in his youth only but unto his life's end. He shewed his lowliness and modesty in his outward apparel as well as in his speech and conduct, and if he perceived that anyone

THE LIFE OF

went beyond the established usage or fell short thereof, he always strove to persuade him to choose the better part.

For himself he chose the lowest place unfeignedly and of set purpose, and just as the bearing of humiliation is a burden to some, so his burden was the finding of humiliations to inflict upon himself.

Amid the Brothers he was cheerful but not frivolous, nor was he given to much talking but put a guard over his mouth and uttered only words tending to edification, for he was more ready to hear than to teach.

In his labour he was faithful and earnest, and was grieved if he could not always rise up in the night and help the Brothers in their brewing. Before the hour for writing he would prepare his pens so that he might be the less hindered from his work and the more promote the common good.

(12) He strove so to order his doings that the Brethren might not be burdened by him, but that he might rather bring in something to their profit; and therefore in his anxiety to avoid so far as possible consuming the fruit of their labours he gladly performed his share of the common labour, and also tasks beyond these. Moreover he rejoiced that if aught was lacking in the gains that he earned by writing this was supplied by his father after the flesh who used to send year by year a certain sum of money to the Brethren. After the death of his parents he would have given gladly all the inheritance which fell to him for the use of the Community, but in this purpose he was hindered by death, which was beforehand with him. For when he was purposed to go to

ARNOLD OF SCHOONHOVEN

Holland to settle the affairs of his inheritance, he came to Zutphen, to the Brethren who were then sojourning there, and after a few days he fell sick just after the Feast of St. Philip and St. James, wherefore his journey to his native land was deferred lest haply his end might come when he was far from the fellowship of the Brethren.

(13) Though he felt that his weakness was growing more and more upon him yet he lay not long upon his bed, for upon the Day of St. Wyrone the Bishop—which was the last save one of his life—he himself made his own bed, and on the following day, that is on the Feast of St. Gengulphus the Martyr, about the hour of Vespers, having settled his affairs, he received the Communion of the Holy Body of Christ and the Unction. But late in the evening, feeling himself very weak, he desired that the Brethren should come together to him, and to them he devoutly commended himself, begging them to pray faithfully for him and to report his death to a certain devout Virgin at Schiedam, named Lydewy, who had promised to pray for him, for he had once visited her in Holland, and many wondrous things are told of her by reason of her long suffering patience.

Having made these requests he lay until the tenth hour when the day was closing, continuing sound in mind, and he showed no sadness when he came to the last hour but said he was ready. Then, his Brethren being present and praying round him, he rendered up his soul without much pain, as it would seem. He had lived amongst the Devout Brothers from his youth up, in a good conscience, being a true worshipper of God

LIFE OF ARNOLD OF SCHOONHOVEN

and a devout lover of Christ, and had persevered for thirty-one years in the Community in the humble condition of a Clerk.

This sweet and amiable Brother died in the year of the Lord 1430, on the ninth day of May, in the City of Zutphen in Gelders, and was buried in the Cemetery of the Blessed Virgin Mary toward the South side of the Church.

Novice

(14) Hearing the lives of these men I am constrained to despise mine own, for thereby I see how far I am from the true virtue.

But yet I hope that it is profitable to me to have learned this from thy narration, for I purpose from my heart to amend myself.

The Elder Brother


For this purpose I have told these things to thee, though briefly, that thou mayest make it thy study to give thyself to fervency of spirit, nor ever aspire to any dignity or honourable office, but mayest rather labour to be altogether in subjection and to root out thy vices.

So shalt thou be able the more fully to please God Who doth ever grant a special grace of devotion to the humble, and after the toil of this present life glory for ever and ever to them that have fought a good fight.

AMEN.



CHISWICK PRESS : CHARLES WHITTINGHAM AND CO.
TOOKS COURT, CHANCERY LANE, LONDON.



BX 890 .T5 3

Thomas, 1380-1471.

The founders of the new
devotion

